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A ROOM OF HER OWN: ROMANCE, RESISTANCE, AND FEMINIST THOUGHT IN MODERN URDU POETRY

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A Room of Her Own: Romance, Resistance, and Feminist Thought in Modern Urdu Poetry

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2015

Dedication

In loving memory of ali

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking my supervisor, Akbar Hyder, who always believed in me and never gave up on me. His confidence in me was a source of motivation for me to embark on this project. He guided me through every step of this process and supported me at every obstacle. This project would not have been possible without Akbar's invaluable investment in it. Thank you for making late evening Urdu poetry classes fun and sharing your passion with your students.

My special thanks to Ishart Afreen who graciously agreed to work with me and shared her poetry, wisdom, and experiences. She was extremely generous in giving me her time. I enjoyed our numerous conversations during which she helped me tremendously in thinking through the nuances of Urdu poetics.

Thanks to my committee members who generously gave their time and attention: Gail Minault, who is an inspiration and a role model as a teacher; Carla Petievich, for all the detailed feedback and continuous encouragement she provided; Kamala Visweswaran, whose knowledge and guidance were irreplaceable; Heather Hindman, who pushed me to think of issues outside the box; and Afsar Mohammad, who was always encouraging and a source of many interesting conversations and laughter.

Thanks to Jennifer Tipton who works tirelessly to support and guide all the graduate students. Her knowledge of and help with all the official processes prevented many headaches. Thanks also to the South Asia Institute, Kamran Ali and Rachel Meyer. Rachel's warmth and kindness were always appreciated. Thanks to Shahnaz Hassan who was always there to help and offer guidance. Thanks to Martha Selby, Joel Brereton,

Cynthia Talbot, Oliver Freiberger, Rupert Snell, Kathryn Hansen, Jishnu Shankar, Vidhu Chaturvedi and Salwa Uzri who have always been supportive.

Thanks to Suzanne Schulz, you have been a wonderful friend. Thanks also to other friends who have been a source of support throughout this long process: Michaela von Paumgartten, Ali Sengul, Sundar Vadlamudi, Asiya Alam, Vibha Shetiya, Kathleen Longwaters, Hillary Langberg, Robert Ellis and Caitlin McClune. Thank you all for the camaraderie, commiserating, and the laughs along the way. Thanks also to my wonderful friends outside academia: Gina Turner, John Purves, and Chelsea Aldridge.

I would like to offer my heartfelt gratitude to my sister Umber, and the rest of her family, Amer, Raza and Noor, for their love and support. I am eternally grateful to my sister for being a source of comfort. Thank you for always looking out for me.

Last, but not least, my sincere gratitude to my writing partner and dear friend, Keely “Frodo” Sutton. You have been my anchor. Your friendship and support made this arduous journey manageable and very pleasant.

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Supervisor: Syed Akbar Hyder

This dissertation examines the ways in which the female figure has emerged, and the ways in which women's issues have been addressed in Urdu poetry in various ways during the twentieth century. In order to track these changes and shifts in the Urdu poetic landscape I examine five poets: Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Akhtar Shirani (1905-1948), Kaifi Azmi (1919-2002), Parveen Shakir (1952-1994), and Ishrat Afreen (b. 1956). I argue that each of these poets represents a distinct trend in the way women are discussed in Urdu poetry. While looking at these five poets I will consider the social context in which they were writing and how their poetry engages the canonical aesthetics of the past, along with the socio-political agendas of the present. By analyzing their poetry we can trace how through romance and resistance feminist thought developed in increments throughout the twentieth century.

This poetry is a reflection of the social and cultural milieus in which it was written; it can help us understand how these poets understood their roles within their culture, as well as how they tried to push the boundaries of accepted cultural norms.

Through these poets we can observe how the subject of Woman, women's issues, and gender ideology evolved in twentieth century Urdu poetry. Furthermore, studying these poets shows us how the space created by earlier poets eventually led to women using the Urdu poetry landscape for overt feminist poetry, lending authentic women's voices to women's issues and movements in South Asia.

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Chapter One – Introduction

Here's the best bit: the extent to which men have made claims of understanding women, women have never birthed from their intellect any definitive claims about men. Men said, 'man is cruel,' [women] silently began to bear cruelty; men said, 'women are cowards,' [women] began to fear even a mouse; then they said, 'when time comes, women risk their lives,' and [women] instantly risked their lives. The mother's affection is blazoned in the entire world, no one cries for the father's fatherhood. Women's honor can be breached, not a man's. Perhaps man does not even have honor in the first place so there is no question of losing it. Women have illegitimate and legitimate children, not men. For centuries philosophers have arraigned women with all sorts of charges in the hopes of befuddling them. They either raise the woman to the skies or dump her in the smut. But they are terrified of standing with her on equal grounds. [Men] will turn her into a goddess or a creature of heavens but they are embarrassed to call her a friend or a companion. I do not know if this is an inferiority complex or a misjudgment. One has to wonder, why are they scared of treating women as their equals?[1]

Ismat Chughtai

In her provocative essay '*Aurat* (Woman), Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991) is bemused by the ways in which women are turned into objects of men's desires, values, and languages. Neither does she spare the East nor the West. If one part of the world has issued golden sayings about women, the other part has defined the 'world' for women. Chughtai invokes the godly guru who says a woman is only half a woman; the other half is a dream: "If someone had asked his wife's opinion, perhaps she would have said, 'Gurudev himself was a full dream and he was also the most beautiful interpretation of

[1] Asif Navaz Chaudhri and Tariq Chaudhri (eds.) *Ismat Chughtai ke sau afsāne* (Lahore: Chaudhri Academy, no date), 982-983.

that dream.'" Chughtai in this essay accumulates heterogeneous inadequate excuses to marginalize women: "Women are not prophets; women are not messengers; women are not alluring enough." She jolts the readers with her retort: "Why does someone not rise up and say 'women are not women'"[2]

What does it mean to be a woman? What do women desire? Why do women matter? These are questions as eternal as women and men. Many have tried to answer them; I am not one of them. My objective in this study is modest. As a student of Urdu literature, I explore the ways in which women become subjects of Urdu poetry in the last hundred years. The role of Urdu poetry in South Asia is well acknowledged. As Gail Minault points out:

> It is very difficult for someone from a different culture to grasp the importance and power of Urdu poetry in Indo-Muslim culture. Whether religious, historical, or lyric, the prevalent form of literary expression in India, as in most of the Muslim world, was poetry. The ability to compose poetry extemporaneously and to drop couplets at appropriate points in a conversation were the marks of a truly cultivated individual. One of the favorite forms of social gathering among gentlemen was the mushā'ira or poetic recitation. Paralleling this elitist tradition of public recitation was the popular tradition of singing devotional poetry at religious festivals and pilgrimage sites. Lyric poetry was thus accessible to the illiterate many as well as to the lettered few. As poetic recitations became part of the political mass meetings as well, poetry became a means of communicating between the politicized elite and the throngs in their audience. It is virtually impossible to estimate the impact of political poetry on the popular mind in terms of actual ideas conveyed or numbers swayed. Poetry, however, was a form of literary expression that spoke to the emotions. As such, it was an ideal medium for reaching the hearts of many Muslims who remained unmoved by political discussion.[3]

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[2] Chaudhri and Chaudhri (eds.) *Ismat Chughtai*, 989.

[3] Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 154-155.

In this work, I offer a glimpse of five poets as they relate to the subject of Woman: Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Akhtar Shirani (1905-1948), Kaifi Azmi (1919-2002), Parveen Shakir (1952-1994), and Ishrat Afreen (b. 1956). I argue that each of these poets represents a distinct literary-reformist trend and provides compelling insights into Urdu poetic discourses tied to women. All of them have been popular—as performers in poetry assemblies and as writers. These poets articulate their idea of reform by providing distinct frameworks of women's oppression, resistance, and empowerment. At times the language of poetry (especially the widely-cherished principle of ambiguity) assists them in evading responsibility; at other times their art holds them accountable as witnesses to the state of women's suffering.

While studying these five poets I consider the social context in which they wrote and how their poetry engages the canonical aesthetics of the past, along with the socio-political agendas of the present. By analyzing their poetry we can trace how through romance and resistance feminist thought developed in increments throughout the twentieth century into the twenty-first. Through the verses of these poets, we can observe how the subject of Woman and women's issues transformed in the last century, and how the space created by earlier poets eventually led to women using the Urdu poetry landscape for overt feminist poetry, lending women's voices to women's issues and movements in South Asia.

I. Women's Reform Movements in India

The story of women's reform movements in India cannot abide by the rules of any one discourse. As Faisal Devji and many others have concluded, the languages of law, architecture, nation, colonialism, mysticism, class, caste, region, and poetry were deployed to speak of women and reform.[4] Even though plenty of women were speaking about themselves and about the reforms that mattered to them, we do not hear their voices as loudly as we hear the voices of men.[5] Moreover, many of those who tell women's stories do not account for the multiple identities that shape all our lives and communities. Zoya Hasan is alert to the challenges of writing about women and community:

> For one, community identities and women's identities are dispersed and multiple. While community identity is often articulated sporadically, underplayed or stressed in different ways at different times, identities are neither inherited or constant. Rather, contending notions of collective identity may exist, one of which may become dominant at one time, while others at another time. This is because the boundaries of collective identity are fluid and subject to mutation and redefinition. This is especially so in the case of women whose identities are not just multiple but also open to constant renegotiation and reformulation in different contexts. Kumkum Sangari has made the point that women's identity, like other social identities need not be sought along a single unified axis.[6]

Debates concerning the identities of male-female, masculine-feminine, homosexual-heterosexual, Hindu-Muslim, Western-Eastern, Pakistani-Indian, First World-Third World, Colonizer-Colonized and other similar dichotomies have been raging for decades and there is no sign they will be resolved soon. These dichotomies

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[4] See Faisal Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: the movement for women's reform, 1857-1900," in *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities and the State.* Ed. Zoya Hasan, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994), 22-38.

[5] See Asiya Alam, *Marriage in Transition: Gender, Family And Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India.* Dissertation, the University of Texas at Austin, 2013.

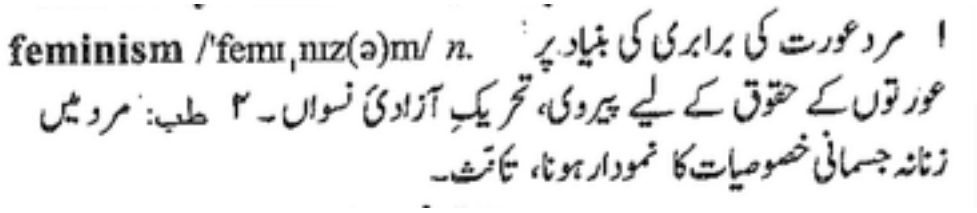
[6] Zoya Hasan. *Forging Identities: Gender, Communities, and the State* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1994), xv.

often neglect that which is in the middle: for example, Miraji (1912-1949) was a brilliant Urdu poet who refused to cede his writing to those who receive gender and sexuality in a polarized manner. Similarly, within the traditions of Hindu exclusivism and the Muslim one, that which is composite and shared is uneasily accepted in today's South Asia. C.M. Naim, Carla Petievich, and Ruth Vanita, among others, survey *rekhtī,* the genre of Urdu poetry in which "men speak as women".[7] Is this genre a spoof on language and practices that are gendered feminine or is it a challenge to patriarchal practices that the poets' society subscribed to? How popular was this genre of poetry vis-à-vis other poetic discourses? These questions do not have easy answers.

The attitude adopted toward women or men, Hindu or Muslim, and the determination to bring about justice is not necessarily predetermined by one's gender, sexuality, or religion. All of us also know that it is easier to articulate ideas of reform in poetry, slogans, and academic essays than it is to implement them. Implementation of reform and carrying over this reform (in language) beyond one's regional and linguistic confines is also a challenge: for example, the English word *feminism* has encountered a patchy reception in Urdu—*taḥrīk-e āzādi-e nisvāṅ* (the movement for women's freedom), *tānīsiyat* (movement concerning women), *iṣlāh-e nisā* (women's reform), and *feminism*, all correspond to the English word "feminism," share a concern for women's uplift, but retreat from identifying consensual foundations of injustice or reform. Allow me to

[7] See C.M. Naim, "Transvestic Words?: The Rekhti in Urdu," in *Urdu Texts and Contexts, The Selected Essays of C.M. Naim.* 42-66, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); Carla Petievich, *When Men Speak as Women: Vocal Masquerade in Indo-Muslim Poetry* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008); Ruth Vanita, *Gender, Sex, and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry in India, 1780-1870* (Delhi: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

reproduce here the Urdu text that defines "feminism" in the popular Oxford English Urdu Dictionary edited by Shanul Haq Haqqee[8]:


feminism /'femɪˌnɪz(ə)m/ *n.* ۱ مرد عورت کی برابری کی بنیاد پر عورتوں کے حقوق کے لیے پیروی، تحریکِ آزادیٔ نسواں۔ ۲ طب: مرد میں زنانہ جسمانی خصوصیات کا نمودار ہونا، تانّث۔

[1. The advocacy of women's rights on the principle of equality of men and women, the movement for women's freedom. 2. Medicine: the manifestation of physical feminine traits in men, feminization.]

The definition of a feminist is much more straightforward: "one who advocates women's rights."

The interpretation of these rights is aligned with multiple concentric agendas: those of religion, nation, class, region, and power of course. That is, there is no agreement in Urdu whether injustice to women was wrought by the canonical Islamic tradition (the Qur'an and the *hadith* are in the forefront of this tradition), by the chauvinistic men who deliberately misread these texts to the advantage of patriarchy, by communities in India who did not have direct access to Arabic, by colonial educational institutions, by an ignorance of the natural and biological sciences, by capitalism, by local hegemonies, or by language itself. These contentions in Urdu are paralleled in other parts of the world, including those parts where *feminism* is not so strange to the parlance. I would like to put forward these concerns and concessions at the very beginning of this

[8] Shanul Haq Haqqee, *Oxford English-Urdu Dictionary* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013, 9th edition), 574.

study and submit to interpretations of the texts at hand that are much different from the ones I offer.

If one were to trace the history of the appearance of women in the discourse of reformist Urdu literature, one would turn to the likes of Nazir Ahmed (1830-1912). He was concerned with women's uplift but it was an uplift that did not always assume that men were superior to women. Ahmed was writing in Urdu in a world that witnessed interaction among various linguistic and religious traditions.[9] For instance, Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), a Bengali who was greatly influenced by western liberal thought, advocated staunchly for women's education. He took a stance against *sati* and polygyny, and he believed women should have the right to inherit and control property. While criticizing this poor status of women in India Raja Rammohan Roy wrote:

> At marriage the wife is recognized as half of her husband, but in after-conduct they are treated worse than inferior animals. For the woman is employed to do the work of a slave in the house…to clean the place…to scour the dishes, wash the floor, to cook night and day, to prepare and serve food for her husband, father, mother-in-law, brothers-in-law and friends and connections.[10]

Roy further points out that there is a culture of violence against women, especially in the lower castes, but one that also exists in higher castes. He notices that the wife is chastised at the slightest fault and must bear cruelty as punishment. If she decides to leave her husband's house and fails, she faces various forms of torment and may even be privately put to death by the husband as revenge, for trying to leave him.[11] Raja Rammohan Roy felt obliged to critique women's social position because women were largely unable to

[9] See Nazir Ahmed, *Majmū'a Deputy Nazir Ahmed,* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1998).
[10] Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1992), 81.
[11] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 81-82.

advocate for themselves. That he focused so much on women's plight as wives indicates that women did not have their own independent identities and were almost entirely dependent on their husbands for their upkeep; though the degree of this dependence varied from class to class and is discussed in more detail later.

Although not all social issues had overlap in both the Hindu and Muslim communities in India, the status of women, by and large, was one of subordination in both communities. And even though Islam provided some protections to women by allowing divorce, remarriage, and inheritance rights, many Muslim women were denied these rights because over centuries of coexistence Indian Muslims had adopted many Hindu cultural norms, including a kind of caste system.[12] Muslim reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also advocated for reforms intended to raise the status of women. Some, like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, challenged the extreme form of *pardah* (veiling) practiced by Indian Muslims and believed that women should receive some basic education.[13] However, we must not have any illusions about Nazir Ahmed, Sir Syed, and their ilk even suggesting that women and men should access same rights and resources. The issues of *pardah*, the plight of an Indian widow, and women's education that occupied Hindu and Muslim reformers are taken up in the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal, Akhtar Shirani, and Kaifi Azmi. Britain colonized much of India for substantial periods of nineteenth and twentieth centuries and during these colonial moments women stood as a source of tension between the colonizers and the colonized

[12] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 75. This is not to say that South Asia was the only part of the Muslim world where women's Islamic rights were denied due to traditionally patriarchal practices.
[13] Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 92.

men. This tension itself was not uniform. Moreover, as Partha Chatterjee illustrates in his important work on colonialism, nationalism, and gender, even though physical bodies and spaces were colonized, the imagination did not necessarily follow suit.[14]

As the nationalist movement grew, more and more women, both Hindu and Muslim, answered the call of leaders like Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru,[15] and Muhammad Ali Jinnah to mobilize. Notwithstanding this, as Kamala Visweswaran points out, it is a shame that even ostensibly reformist academic enterprises are determined by "silence on the subject of women within the parameters of *Subaltern Studies."*[16] Many women participated in the struggle for independence in hopes of seeing a more just gender order but unfortunately they were left disillusioned—their voices, especially if they were also afflicted by lower class and caste, silenced.

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[14] See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

[15] Kumari Jayawardena (1992). That nationalism and women's rights were integrally tied together is made clear in a speech Jawaharlal Nehru gave at Allahbad, on March 31, 1928. While addressing both the issues of nationalism and women's rights he said:

> I should like to remind the women present here that no group, no community, no country, has ever got rid of its disabilities by the generosity of the oppressor. India will not be free until we are strong enough to force our will on England and the women of India will not attain their full rights by the mere generosity of the men of India. They will have to fight for them and force their will on menfolk before they can succeed (p. 73).

Kumari Jayawardena explains that although women's rights movements in India were started in the context of resistance to imperialism, it is interesting to note that many issues that the early reformers championed were ones that Christian missionaries had pointed out as reprehensible practices. These issues included *sati* (widow immolation), restrictions on widow remarriage, polygamy, and women's property rights (pp. 84-85). Given that the reformers and nationalists wanted to be respected as a modern nation after having gained independence, it is understandable that the practices they chose to change were the ones considered undesirable by Europeans. Furthermore, since many of these practices could be linked to religious orthodoxy, perhaps the reformers also wanted to chip away at the power and privilege of religious institutions. In both in north and south India, the anti-Brahmin movement was linked to women's rights struggle (p. 81).

[16] Kamala Visweswaran, "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography," in *Subaltern Studies,* 9, (1996): 85.

As far as the contribution of the nationalist and anti-colonial movement to Urdu literature is concerned, perhaps the most striking one is the shaping of *taraqqī pasand taḥrīk,* the Progressive Writers' Movement. This movement that began in the looming shadow of Muhammad Iqbal sought women out, as it did the proletariat. It leveled charges against the capitalist order complicit in the colonial-imperial one. It owed a debt to Marx and the Soviet Union's "socialist realism" as it did to the age-old tropes of Urdu literature. Iqbal famously said:

uṭho mērī duniyā kē ġharīboṅ ko jagā do
kākh-e umarā kē dar o dīvār hilā do
jis khēt sē dahqāṇ ko mayassar nahīṅ rozī
us khēt kē har khoshā-e gandum ko jalā do[17]

Rise! Awaken the poor of my world
Shake the foundations of the palaces of the rich
The field that does not compensate the farmer with daily bread
Put a match to its every sheaf of wheat

These are powerful words from a man who had a stronger hold on the progress of Urdu literature than any other man or woman in the last hundred years. Progress to Iqbal and those who followed him was very much a product of interconnected ideologies and agendas. Islam, in its multiple manifestations, was the crucial splice, even for many other poets who did not wear religion as a badge of honor.

II. Feminism and Islam

Recent scholarship by scholars of Islam, like Amina Wadud, has presented the view that the Qur'an, the ultimate source of Islamic law, does not discriminate between

[17] See Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 148.

men and women, and that any interpretations of the Qur'an that place restrictions on women are limited only by the understanding of the interpreter.[18]

Parveen Shakir (1952-1994) and Ishrat Afreen (b. 1956), the two female poets in this study, grew up in a Pakistan that was increasingly becoming an exclusivist Sunni Islamic state starting in the late 1970s. Its ideology was based on conservative interpretations of the *Sharia*, driven by the political and cultural agendas of men who lived in a rigidly patriarchal society. In order to properly appreciate the poetry of these women, and to understand the nature of their resistance, it is important to look at feminist trends in the Islamic context as a whole. Parveen Shakir and Ishrat Afreen represent a tradition of female activist poets not wholly unfamiliar in the Islamic world.[19]

Shahrzad Mojab, activist and scholar of gender studies, writes that the western ideas of feminism were a product of capitalism and modern politics. Women's movements in the West focused on gender equality in both the private sphere (the home), and in the public sphere (the political state), which was represented by the struggle for suffrage.[20] This western-style feminism was introduced to "Islamic societies" in the late nineteenth century and drew a range of responses from complete rejection to calls for appropriation of the thinking, considered necessary in order to empower women. Both sides of the debate, the religious orthodoxy that was the guardian of patriarchy, and the secular modernists, used the Qur'an, the *Sharia*, and *hadith*, to prove or disprove whether

[18] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 34-35.
[19] Shahrzad Mojab (2001, pp. 125-26). Mojab gives the examples of Iranian poets, Mah Sharuf Khanum Kurdistani (1805-1847), and Qurrat al-'Ayn (1814-1852) who articulated the feminine identity, which may be seen as forms of indigenous feminism.
[20] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 126.

feminism was compatible with Islam.[21] As the Middle East and gender relations scholar Deniz Kandiyoti points out, opposing sides can offer very different interpretations using the very same sources. Using the Qur'an, the *Hadith*, and the lives of prominent women during the early years of Islam, literalist Muslims have argued that the existing gender asymmetries in Islamic societies are divinely sanctioned, while feminists have argued that early Islam displayed egalitarian ideals.[22]

Shahrzad Mojab explains that the first woman to argue that patriarchal oppression was against the doctrines of Islam was Nazira Zain al-Din, born in Lebanon in 1905. She reinterpreted religious texts to offer a reading more conducive to women's rights, such as arguing that the practice of veiling was insulting to both men and women.[23] Some modern, secular academics have coined the term "Islamic feminism" as an alternative to western feminism, and view "Islam as the only authentic, indigenous road to gender equality and justice" in Islamic states "and advocate for the approach that seeks compatibility of Islam and feminism."[24] This approach is somewhat similar to the situation in Europe before the Age of Enlightenment (1600s-1700s) when the very first European women to speak for themselves and for their gender framed their arguments within the religious context.[25]

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[21] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 130.
[22] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Women, Islam and the State," *Middle East Report* 173, (1991): 9.
[23] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 127.
[24] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 130.
[25] Margaret Walter, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.
- Women in Europe at the time offered their reinterpretations of Genesis, that Adam was just as much to blame for the Fall as Eve (p. 9).
- As proof that women had an equal, or high status in Christianity, in 1611 Amelia Layner wrote that: Christ "was begotten of a woman, born of a woman, nourished by a woman, obedient to a woman…he healed women, pardoned women, comforted women…after his resurrection, appeared first to a woman. (p. 10)."

Referencing Deniz Kandiyoti, Mojab explains that finding compatibility between Islam and feminism is based on a fundamental fallacy; that "this fallacy resides in addressing Islam qua religion and interrogating its central texts in search for an answer to the question of women's rights."[26] Kandiyoti points out that there is an inherent contradiction in political systems where the constitution of the country guarantees men and women equality under the law, but at the same time their *Sharia* based personal laws deprive women of equal rights.[27] Mojab herself argues that Islamic feminism is a contradiction in terms, and that Islamic feminists, whether they are fundamentalists or reformists, or of any variety in between, do not have a chance of posing any serious challenge to patriarchy.[28] Islamic feminists on the other hand argue that Islam has given Muslim women a unique status and has afforded them equal rights.[29]

Although it can be easily argued that to base a strand of feminism around Islam, a patriarchal religion, is contrary to the goals of women's rights movements that aim to challenge patriarchy, it may be exactly what is needed in Islamic countries, with Islamic laws. Women's organizations in Pakistan had to challenge discriminatory Islamic laws from within the constraints of Islamic traditions; their efforts will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. Pakistani women chose to use re-interpretations of Islamic texts because they were challenging patriarchal interpretations of Islamic law and saw arguments for rights based on Islam being strategically beneficial to them.

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[26] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Islam and Feminism: A Misplaced Polarity," *Women Against Fundamentalism* 8, no. 11 (1996): 10, quoted in Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 131.
[27] Deniz Kandiyoti, "Islam and Feminism: A Misplaced Polarity," *Women Against Fundamentalism* 8, no. 11 (1996): 10-11, quoted in Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 140.
[28] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 131.
[29] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 137.

Iman Hashim explains that feminist movements in the West have sought to bring about equality primarily through legislation, thus in order to effect change in laws in Islamic societies women can benefit from using the Qur'an as the basis for their argument because it is considered divine, and hence, is an irrefutable source of law.[30] This does not mean that women have an easy task as long as they can use the Qur'an to make their case. The difficulty, of course, lies in convincing the religious orthodoxy in patriarchal societies that the pro-women interpretations of the Qur'an and other sources of Islamic tradition are valid. Pakistani women used their reinterpretation of the Qur'an, instead of basing their fight against discriminatory laws on secular arguments because they knew that many Muslims distrust secular feminism; they view the "feminist emphasis of equal rights" being at "odds with the Islamic notion of the complementarity of the sexes, and specific roles and rights laid down for men and women" in Islam.[31]

Mojab points out further limitations of Islamic feminism when she explains that whereas western feminist movements have been able to achieve legal equality (albeit not extra-legal equality in social and economic spheres)[32] Islamic feminism is not "ambitious enough to demand universal formal equality."[33] Further stressing the incongruent nature of Islam in social practice and women's equality, Mojab offers as evidence that by 1998, out of the twenty-two members of the League of Arab States only eleven had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The remaining eleven approved it with some reservations. Those reservations

[30] Iman Hashim, "Reconciling Islam and Feminism." *Gender and Development* 7, no. 1 (1999): 9.
[31] Hashim, "Reconciling Islam," 7.
[32] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 140-41.
[33] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 139.

were based on religion and, "Islam was the obstacle to the elimination of one or another form of discrimination."[34]

However, a feminist position that rejects Islam can be problematic for Muslim women. Iman Hashim notes that for many Muslim women Islam is an important aspect of their identity. Islam is not a source of constraints and oppression for these women, but instead, it is a source of social and psychological support. It would be "almost impossible for an average Muslim woman to retain her identity and position in society, were she to reject religious laws and customs."[35] This is exactly what Saba Mahmood discovered while conducting an ethnographic study of the women's mosque movement in Egypt; many Muslim women see Islam as a source of empowerment and an essential part of their identity. The women's mosque movement that Mahmood researched was a part of the Islamic Revival trend that started in the late 1980s. Women involved in the movement started organizing weekly religious lessons, first at private homes, and then at mosques. The movement came as a "response to the perception that religious knowledge, as a means of organizing daily conduct, had become increasingly marginalized under modern structures of governance." It was meant to counter the secularization and westernization of modern life in Egypt that many Muslim women viewed as detrimental to their religion and culture.[36]

Saba Mahmood points out that women who participate in Islamist movements provoke negative responses from feminists because they are seen as pawns of the same

[34] Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics," 143.
[35] Hashim, "Reconciling Islam," 8.
[36] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

patriarchal regime that subordinates them.[37] However, Egyptian women who have been part of the mosque movement have challenged normative practices and displayed agency by conducting public meetings in mosques (normally male-centered spaces), and by changing the nature of Islamic pedagogy by teaching each other Islamic doctrine.[38] Mahmood further explains that freedom of will of those who are understood to be marginalized and oppressed is an integral part of feminism and the feminist project, and hence, even women who are involved in Islamist movements are exercising their relative freedom "to formulate and to enact self-determined goals and interests…"[39] And that freedom in the end is "the ability to autonomously 'choose' one's desires no matter how illiberal they may be."[40] Even if liberal feminists consider the mosque movement and Egyptian women's participation in it as conforming and yielding to patriarchy, it is still a form of agency, even if it is practiced "from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment."[41] Furthermore, through this agency the women of the mosque movement resist other forms of oppressive orders, such as capitalism and westernization.[42]

In some ways Mahmood's work was built upon the work of Leila Abu-Lughod, who also subtly influenced the present study. Abu-Lughod studied the Bedouin group known as the Awlad 'Ali who had settled on the coast of Egypt, west of Alexandria. She

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[37] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 1
[38] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 2.
- Mahmood describes "agency" as "the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)" (p. 8).
[39] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 10.
[40] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 12.
[41] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 15.
[42] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 24.

describes various forms of resistance that Bedouin women enact, and proposes that we use "resistance as a *diagnostic* of power."[43] While studying types of resistance it is not necessary to attribute a political or feminist consciousness to the women who resist.[44] Studying and understanding forms of resistance can help us understand the nature of power and the ways in which it is held up and subverted by women and other marginalized or oppressed groups in order to meet their needs and interests.

According to Abu-Loghud, the Awlad 'Ali women use four different types of resistances. The first type includes silence as a form of resistance. Women use secrets and silence to their advantage while defying the elder men of their community when they cover for each other and withhold information. This form of resistance is aided by a patriarchal practice that is enforced on them: the separation of sexes. They fiercely protect this separation, because it allows them the freedom to act out this particular form of resistance. Another way the Awlad 'Ali women practice resistance is when mothers block arranged marriages that their daughters do not desire; this is in direct opposition to the elder males who have the apparent power in making such unions.[45] This form of resistance is not always successful, but even when the mothers fail to block such marriages they do not remain silent. When they are unsuccessful, in order to show their opposition to the union women often sing songs at the wedding that taunt the groom and his family, to the embarrassment of all the males.[46] The third form of resistance by the

[43] Lila Abu-Loghud, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 42.
[44] Abu-Loghud, "The Romance of Resistance" 47.
[45] Abu-Loghud, "The Romance of Resistance," 43.
[46] Abu-Loghud, "The Romance of Resistance," 44.

Bedouin women is when they mock and parody men and manhood. They are delighted when men fail in their roles, especially those instances that undermine their supposed moral superiority over women. Women also joke about men when they "fail as a result of sexual desire."[47]

However, the most important form of Bedouin female resistance, according to Abu-Lughod, is a kind of oral lyric poetry called *ghinnāwas*. This poetry challenges and subverts the moral code of the Bedouin because it also contains songs of relationships with the opposite sex and the romantic love that is considered immoral or immodest.[48] It is because of this argument that I recognize Parveen Shakir's poems, discussing women's romantic and sexual desires, as a form of feminist resistance, which resists and subverts Pakistan's religious, cultural, and patriarchal norms.

As Anita Anantharam explains, women have used poetry frequently "during moments of religious revitalization and under repressive governments."[49] India saw much religious revitalization during the nationalist struggle. Many Hindus and Muslims turned to religion to forge political identities. Women's bodies and their chastity formed part of the discourse on the formation of national identities, because they represented the victory of "Indian nationalism" over "European materialism.[50] Anantharam further elaborates that women who are seeking to secure rights for their gender often accept the idea of male construction of womanhood because that acceptance allows them access to the public sphere. And that "when women's bodies are displaced, ignored, or outright

[47] Abu-Loghud, "The Romance of Resistance," 45.
[48] Abu-Loghud, "The Romance of Resistance," 46-47.
[49] Anita Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember: Women's Indigenous Knowledge and Cosmopolitanism in South Asian Poetry* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 5.
[50] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 8.

silenced by nationalist discourse or during moments of religious revitalization, they are refigured back into the public body by various strategies…"[51] and poetry is just one of the strategies with which women can voice their concerns and even resist. In post-Partition India and Pakistan women continued to use poetry, because through its use they could protest and voice their grievances while still keeping the image of purity that is expected of them. "The 'doubleness' of meaning that is embedded in any metaphor serves as a protective cover through which women could maintain an impeccable social standing and be critical at the same time."[52]

III. Chapter Divisions

This dissertation consists of five main chapters and each introduces a different poet. In Chapter Two I introduce the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). Iqbal was influenced by the early years of Indian Nationalist awakening in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This was a time when women's bodies especially became a focus of men's concerns and nationalist imaginings. Modern Hindu and Muslim identities were coming into being at this time, partly in response to colonial categorizations. These identities were also springing from reformist concerns: "how do we improve the lot of our people as they become colonial subjects?" was a question many were asking. The answers were invariably taking into account the status of women in the existing societies. Iqbal is one of the nationalists who sought to reform the Indian Muslim community, and his poetry engages with many issues affecting Muslims in general, and Indian Muslims and women

[51] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 9.
[52] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 205.

in particular. He approaches the issue of women's role in society from multiple angles and addresses issues such as women's education, veiling, and women's liberation. Although Iqbal privileges Islam in his philosophy, it must be pointed out that his understanding of Islam and Islamic teachings is influenced by and is a product of South Asian Muslim cultural milieu. His poetry on women is sometimes direct and other times laced with ambiguity. Iqbal's poetry, especially when he refers to *qaum* (community), is similarly ambiguous and veiled; this perhaps is the reason why nationalists of all shades have been able to appropriate his poetry to champion their causes. Though he is not necessarily a feminist or advocate of women's equality, Iqbal is among the first poets to address the question of women's rights in modern Urdu poetry. Although he views women's rights movements as detrimental to an Islamic social order, it is important to begin by looking at his poetry so that we may better understand the types of political and religious ideologies that later poets were responding to, engaging, and resisting.

The poet of "love and romance," Akhtar Shirani (1905-1948), is discussed in Chapter Three. In an environment wherein Muslim male reformers (the likes of Ashraf Ali Thanawi) were primarily using Islam and a vague notion of tradition so as to define the role of Muslim women, Shirani offers a break from this trend. Shirani begins to portray women as independent individuals and not as subjects whose identities are linked to their roles as wives and mothers. In Shirani's poetry the woman has her own name, she is not simply the daughter or the wife of a man. Ishrat Afreen explains that Shirani is important in this trajectory of feminist poets because he is the first male poet to represent

the woman as an independent and whole person.[53] Although his beloved remains the object of a man's romantic desires, Shirani represents a break from tradition when he speaks of his beloved using a proper name and the female, rather than male or neutral, verbal inflection. In a culture that by and large views open discussions of romantic and sexual desires of men and women as taboo, this is a step forward in normalizing women as the subject of love poetry. Shirani also engages with Iqbal's poetry when he addresses topics like veiling and women's education; in fact, he offers a break from Iqbal's discourse.

Chapter Four looks at the poetry of Kaifi Azmi (1919-2002), one of the first unambigiously feminist male Urdu poets. A member of the Communist Party, and member of the Progressive Writers' Movement, Azmi believed that art had to serve the purpose of making society better and easing the suffering of people. His socialist ideals led him to champion gender equality because he believed that men and women both would have to work together in order to make India a strong, socialist nation. Through his poetry he challenges patriarchy and outdated Indian traditions that deprive women of their happiness and the means to realize their full potential. Whereas Iqbal was a proponent of women's seclusion, Azmi positioned women on the forefront of the nationalist struggle to help in the formation of a new nation-state. To this end he lauds female Indian leaders like Sarojini Naidu and also hails Russian women who fought for their socialist state.

[53] Ishrat Afreen. Personal communication, February 18, 2015.

Parveen Shakir (1952-1994), also "known as the poet of love and romance" has been excluded from the canon of feminist Urdu poets.[54] In Chapter Five I look at both Parveen Shakir's love poetry as well as the compositions that address social issues such as the objectification of women, their poor working conditions, and child labor. Her poetry also calls out the writ and authority of the government by bringing to light a topic such as sectarian violence in Pakistan. I argue not only that her poetry engages with feminist social issues, but also that her love poetry should be read as subversive literature. Through her love poetry, in which she discusses women's romantic and sexual desires, she challenges and subverts the normative patriarchal ideology that persists in her culture. Though Shakir's critics have often claimed her poetry in not feminist in nature, I will show otherwise. I argue that even if her approach is not overtly feminist, and does not challenge specific discriminatory laws (like Pakistan's *Hudood* Ordinances), she does address women's issues, as well as other societal issues that impact women and young girls disproportionately. Also, through Shakir, we can broaden our perspective of feminism in Urdu.

The subject of Chapter Six is Ishrat Afreen (b. 1956), the Pakistani-American poet who writes, speaks, and teaches extensively in the United States and in Pakistan. I communicated with her initially by giving her a questionnaire and subsequently I communicated with her over several phone calls and visits, to discuss her poetry and her opinions about other poets in this study. Ishrat Afreen, who has been hailed as a feminist

[54] See Rukhsana Ahmad. *We Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1991), 6. Rukhsana Ahmad explains that she did not include Parveen Shakir in her selection because she believed her poetry to be "apolitical, sentimental, and conformist."

Urdu poet by Rukhsana Ahmad, has lent her voice to women's collective struggles. Perhaps more than any of the other poets in this study, it is Ishrat Afreen who engages with Iqbal's poetry. Whereas Iqbal uses the concept of *ḳhudī* (selfhood) to remind Muslim men of their potential and destiny in this world, Afreen uses the concept of *anā* (pride) in order to empower women and to remind them that they need to be proud of themselves in their gender and not bow down to male authority. She also openly challenges patriarchy and questions traditions that relegate women to an inferior status. She sheds light on the negative way her culture views girls and how parents prefer sons to daughters. In order to challenge and change such negative perceptions of girls and women, she calls on all humans to have the courage to break free from these oppressive and traditional mindsets.

This study contributes to Urdu literature and gender studies by tracing how gender ideologies have been constructed and how feminist thought has developed in modern Urdu poetry. There is a pressing need for exploration of such voices—they help us understand, apart from gendered aesthetics, women's "day-to-day experiences and sites for the construction of gender."[55] My objective in this work is also informed by comparative constructions of feminist archives: to what extent does the feminism in the East overlap with its Western counterpart?

Furthermore, this study places Urdu poetry in the context of resistance to patriarchy and Islamic exclusivity and shows what role selected Urdu poets have played in this movement of resistance. Looking at various types of resistances and expression by

[55] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 137.

women, I propose that as far as feminism is concerned, there is room for a diversity of types, and each form should be looked at in its own context. Each woman or group can advocate for women's rights in a different way and give voice to different aspects of women's experiences – in short, each woman can have a room of her own.

Each poet in this work was a product of his or her times, and their poetry must be understood in the context of the wider movements taking place around them and of which they were part. Each poet also represents an aspect of intertextuality as later poets address topics and concerns mentioned in the poetry of earlier poets. Jonathan Culler describes the concept of intertextuality as a work existing "between and among other texts, through its relations to them. To read something as literature is to consider it as a linguistic event that has meaning in relation to other discourses."[56] Hence, the selected poets are not only reflecting upon their cultural milieu and addressing the needs of their times, they are also in dialogue with each other, building upon, and even responding to ideas and topics addressed earlier. Most importantly, all of them see a cure on the horizon that is laced with Urdu verses.

[56] Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 34.

Chapter Two: Muhammad Iqbal

At one time he said: the community that has given women excessive freedom has certainly regretted its mistake at one time or another. Nature has entrusted women with such important responsibilities that if she obliges to them, she will simply not have the leisure to perform any other task. If she is dismissed from her primary duties and tasked with other ones, the ones men can perform, then this modus operandi will certainly be misguided. For example, if women, whose primary task is to train the future generations, are turned into typists or clerks, then this will not only be a violation of natural law (qānūn-e fiṭrat kī ḳhīlāfvarzī) but it will be a pathetic attempt to disrupt human society.[57]

shauq tirā agar nah ho mērī namāz kā imām
mērā qayāṃ bhī ḥijāb mērā sajūd bhī ḥijāb[58]

If your desire is not the leader of my prayer
My standing is a veil, my prostration is a veil
Iqbal

Though Iqbal's life and poetry have been studied extensively, his poetry on women has not been engaged adequately within Islamic and feminist scholarship in South Asia. This chapter hopes to lift some of the veils from Iqbal's poetic engagement with women. In the process, I hope to situate his poetry as the baseline from which progressive and feminist poets have moved up, and towards gender equality, in the Islamicate world.

[57] I have translated this from Iqbal's authoritative Urdu biography: Abdulmajid Salik, *Zikr-e Iqbāl: Hazrat 'Allama Iqbāl kī savāniḥ ḥayāt,* (Lahore: Bazm-e Iqbal, n.d.) 260. Unfortunately the biographer does not date this quote.

[58] Khwaja Abdulhamid Yazdani, *Asān kulliyāt-e Iqbal,* (Delhi: Kitabi Duniya, 2006), 564. Qayam (standing upright) and sujud (prostration) are the two of the three main positions Muslims assume when performing their ritual prayers, namaz. In the tradition of Perso-Urdu love poetry, the precise identity of the object of the addressee is deliberately left out.

I realize that I am embarking on a study of feminism by turning to a decidedly un-feminist Iqbal—I do so in the hope that by the end of the chapter Iqbal's widely-perceived anti-feminism will not simply be reinforced; rather, it will be nuanced.

As one of the most prominent Urdu poets of the twentieth century and a scholar of Islam, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) holds much weight in the Muslim communities of South Asia and beyond. His art and philosophy flourished during the waning years of British India. The nationalist movement, as well as the formation of rigid identities along religious lines that would eventually lead to the Partition of India, marked this time period. Iqbal was also active in Indian politics and was one of the leading figures of the Indian Muslim community. He developed his philosophy of *khudī* (explained below) in order to guide the Indian Muslims out of a state of disillusion and into the greatness that they had inherited from the Muslim past. Iqbal also penned several poems on the topic of women and commented on their role in society both in poetry and in prose. In order to trace the historical trajectory of the subject of women in Urdu poetry in the twentieth century, and how women made a space for themselves in it, one must engage with the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal.

I. Historical Context:

Muslims and the Rebellion of 1857

The failure of the 1857 Sepoy Revolt (also known as the 1857 Rebellion, or the first war of independence) led to the formal takeover of India by the British, and it also ended the rule of the Mughal dynasty (1526-1857). By the time Muhammad Iqbal was

born, in 1877, Indian Muslims were faced with the reality of adjusting to a new order and at the same time they were re-imagining their identity as Muslims and Indians. One person who tried to lead this identity reformation of Muslims in India was Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), a leading educational reformer in the Indian Muslim community. Though he admitted that Muslims had played a large role in the rebellion he argued that it was in fact the East India Company which was to blame for the uprising, and that the company's poor administration, meddling in the religious affairs of Indians, and its general cultural insensitivity caused the rebellion.[59]

In *Asbāb-e-Baġhāvat-e-Hind* (*The Causes of Indian Rebellion*) Sir Syed Ahmad Khan explained that the perceived threat to religion played an important part in mobilizing Indians against the British, especially the Muslims. He claims that the government administrators had behaved like missionaries. Instead of just paying attention to governing, they had helped the agenda of Christian missionaries. The government bankrolled missionary activities, paid the salaries of the missionaries, and government officials made their servants listen to Christian missionaries.[60]

He further argued that the government's desire of opening schools for girls was seen as a threat by many Muslims because they thought that once educated, Muslim girls would abandon the veil – a widespread practice amongst respectable Muslim families of

[59] Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 38-39. The way Syed Ahmad Khan represents the whole Muslim community, without taking into account the regional and class differences amongst Muslims is interesting to note. His idea of the Muslim *qaum* became one of the dominant narratives through which Muslim identity was formed after the end of the Mughal Empire and loss of sovereignty.
[60] Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, *Causes of Indian Rebellion*, Translated by Jaweed Ashraf. (Delhi: Asha Jyoti Book Sellers & Publishers, 2007) 123.

that time.[61] The English offended religious sensibilities of Indians further when they gave married women "the right for criminal action and the right of owner-husband was abolished over them."[62] Although both Hindus and Muslims rebelled, Sir Syed explains that Muslims were more aggrieved by these practices than the Hindus because:

> …the Hindus follow their religious edicts only as customs and as traditions, but not as religious edicts. They are altogether ignorant of those directives and beliefs of their…religion upon which…redemption and saving of their souls depends…. This is why they are lazy about their religion and are not strong and discriminatory in this respect, except for some ceremonies and restrictions on food and how to eat it…. On the contrary, the Muslims very well know those things that according to their religion, either lead to their redemption or take them to Hell…. This is why they are solid in their religion and have their prejudices. This is why most Muslims were angry, and their participation in disturbances in larger numbers than the Hindus was quite expected.[63]

Despite the role of both Hindus and Muslims, Muslims were largely singled out as the main perpetrators of the revolt, and suffered reprisals. Once the British retook Delhi, the seat of the Mughal Empire, and deposed the emperor, the entire Muslim population was banished from the city.[64] The great Urdu poet Ghalib comments on the calamity that befell Muslims in the aftermath of the 1857 Revolt:

> Now every English soldier that bears arms
> Is sovereign, and free to work his will…
> The city is athirst for Muslim blood
> And every grain of dust must drink its fill...[65]

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[61] Khan, *Causes of Indian Rebellion*, 125-26.
[62] Khan, *Causes of Indian Rebellion*, 32.
[63] Khan, *Causes of Indian Rebellion*, 129-30.
[64] Manzoor Khatana, *Iqbal and the Foundations of Pakistani Nationalism 1857-1947* (Lahore: Shirkat Printing Press, 1992), 21.
- Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 29. Although for all intents and purposes the Mughal rule had ended in 1765 when East India Company took over some administration of the Empire. And even though the Mughal court kept its autonomy under the Maratha protectorate, it was unable to even manage the operations of the royal kitchen, let alone the Empire.
[65] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 31-32.

Even before the end of the revolt, sentiments in the Anglo-Indian press were against Muslims for the most part. During the rebellion, the *Lahore Chronicle* proposed the razing of Delhi in retribution for the killings of European women and children. In one issue, dated July 8, 1857, the paper singled out Muslims as being mainly responsible for the uprising and the violence that was committed during the fighting. It claimed that Muslims were bound by the teachings of the Qur'an and hence were rebellious in nature. In a subsequent issue on September 26, 1857, one editorial in the paper declared that the English policy of religious tolerance had been a failure, and that India should have only one governing policy, a Christian policy.[66]

Muslims were marginalized in many ways in the years following the revolt. Military service and other official positions, like revenue handling, were closed to Muslims. Another reason for the economic marginalization was that many Muslims chose not to avail themselves of western, modern education that the English had to offer.[67] Anti-Muslim sentiment was on the rise in many newspapers. One newspaper, *The Punjab*, put forth the proposition to exclude Muslims from government service of any kind, and to also cut off funding for their education. Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah

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- Even though the Muslims faced the brunt of reprisals in the aftermath of the revolt, in fact just as many Muslims had opposed the revolt and even collaborated with the East India Company as had taken part in the revolt (p. 35).

[66] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 38.

[67] Khatana, *Iqbal and the Foundations*, 23-24.In 1835 English replaced Persian as the language of administration. Many Muslims resented this change and resisted English education that could have prepared them for good government employment.

Zafar's trial furthered the belief that Muslims, and by extension the Urdu press, were the main culprits in spreading insurrection.[68]

In the aftermath of the rebellion many Muslim nobles had their properties confiscated by the British, and professionals, especially in the field of law, were no longer able to practice their trade.[69] The economic condition of the Muslims was further affected negatively because of their opposition to English education.[70] David Lelyveld informs us that looking at the statistics one can easily see that Muslims throughout India were lagging behind in acquiring English education. During 1865-1866, only 57 Muslims were enrolled in colleges in India, out of a total student body of 1,578. And by 1882, there were only 197 Muslims out of a total of 5,339. Whereas the Muslim population in colleges was only around 3 ½ percent, their 11 percent enrollment in secondary schools was slightly better. At that level there were 5,433 Muslim students, out of a total of 62,938.[71] In short, "Muslims…were laggards, all sulking in their tents, dreaming of lost empires and reciting decadent poetry."[72]

However, that Muslims were languishing in poverty may have been more of a perception rather than fact. As Christopher King informs, around 1882, in North-Western Provinces and Oudh (NWP&O), "Muslims held [government] appointments far out of

[68] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 38-39.
[69] Shan Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan: A Political Biography*, (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1969), 33-34.
[70] Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, 35.
[71] D David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 85.
[72] Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 86.

proportion to their actual numbers in the population."[73] The 1881 census of the region put Hindus at 86.8 percent of the population and Muslims at 13.3 percent. However, of the 54,130 official appointments for NWP&O held by Indians, Hindus held 35,302 (65.2 percent), and Muslims held 18,828 (34.8 percent).[74] Although it must be noted that these statistics were based on appointments in which officials used vernacular languages. In order for Muslims to compete for the best government positions they had to avail themselves of English education.

Sir Syed advocated for the acquisition of modern, English education, but only for Muslim men. He believed that it was more important for Muslim men to get educated and once there were enough educated Muslim males they would eventually want their women to be educated too.[75] In order to help Muslims recover from their actual, or perceived dismal state, a group of Indian Muslims (under the leadership of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan) established The Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (*Madrasat ul-'ul'um Musalmanān*) in 1875, a boarding school for young Muslim men.[76] Alluding to a statement by British historian Thomas Babbington Macaulay (1800-1859), Sir Syed said that, the aim of this college was "to form a class of persons, Muhammedan in religion, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, and in intellect."[77]

As Sir Syed Ahmad Khan struggled to promote English education amongst Muslims, he also promoted the idea of the *qaum*, by which he meant Muslims of British

[73] Christopher R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*, (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994), 108.
[74] King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, 108.
[75] Muhammad, *Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, 210-12.
[76] Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, vii.
[77] Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 207.

India. The term *qaum* distinguished Indian Muslims from the worldwide Muslim population, the *ummah*, and was meant to create a new identity for Indian Muslims.[78] Through the Anglo-Oriental College, Sir Syed also wanted to mold the political leadership for Muslims. He told his students that, through this "student brotherhood they would someday forge together the Muslims of India into a fully mobilized political community."[79] Women too attracted special attention in the formation of the new identity, however, their role remained more domestic in nature as they became symbols of spirituality, piety and honor of the community.[80]

Urdu vernacular press, along with Urdu poetry, both played an important role in developing and codifying this discourse of a distinct Muslim community.[81] Iqbal flourished as a poet and philosopher in the wake of the Aligarh movement, which had established the Anglo-Oriental College for Muslims. Iqbal's idea of a single worldwide Muslim community is the extension of Sir Syed's idea of the *qaum*.[82] By devoting much attention to the subject of Muslim identity and reawakening, Iqbal was following this trend that sought to define Muslims as a distinct community with its own set of interests, different from other Indian communities.

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[78] Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 143.
[79] Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation*, 282.
[80] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 45. See also, Parha Chatterjee "The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories," (New Jersy: Princeton University Press) 1993, 119-132.
[81] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 47.
[82] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 39-40. The prominence of religion as a central factor in defining a community was in a large part the result of the East India Company's census method, which counted people as either Hindus or Muslims without having a clear idea of what that really meant and that there are many differences within the communities.

The *Khilafat* Movement

One of the events that captured the imaginations of many Indian Muslims (mainly Sunnis) and united them was the *Khilafat* Movement of 1919. This was a movement stirred by pan-Islamic sentiment whose apparent purpose was to preserve the Muslim caliphate after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War.[83] Gail Minault, however, points out that despite its international and pan-Islamic appearance the movement was very much a domestic one. It was "primarily a campaign by a particular group of Indian Muslim leaders to unite their community politically by means of religious and cultural symbols meaningful to all strata of that community. As such, it can be viewed as a quest for 'pan-Indian Islam.'"[84] Muslim leaders in India used the threat to the caliphate in order to promote Muslim nationalism in India at the time when the Hindu majority was in a better position to bargain with the British. In order to bargain from a position of strength and have a role in the Indian nationalist movement Muslims had to put up a united front.[85]

The leadership of the *Khilafat* Movement came from distinct schools of thought. Aligarh College represented the north Indian elite who favored western education as a way to create Muslim leaders who would lift the Muslim community out of their dismal state and bring them back to prominence. Their approach was based on loyalty to the British Raj and modern education for the Muslim community, so that Muslims could

[83] M. Naeem Qureshi, "The Indian Khilafat Movement (1918-1924)," *Journal of Asian History* 12.2 (1978): 153.
[84] Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.
[85] Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement,* 2-3.

once again compete for and occupy professional and administrative positions.[86] The Deoband School, the other school of thought, was created by the *ulama* (religious scholars) who favored a return to Islamic fundamentals of the Qur'an, the *Hadith*, and the *Sharia*, in order to revitalize Islamic culture in India. The Deoband leaders did not support western and English education. Both the modernist and traditional reform movements became involved in the *Khilafat* Movement and helped to politically mobilize the Indian Muslim community.[87]

The *Khilafat* movement even attracted support from Hindu leaders and the Congress party. Gandhi gave his support to the movement in its early stages and eventually, seeing the political significance of the movement, leaders like Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru threw in their support as well.[88] But despite its mass appeal and support from different sectors the *Khilafatists* were unable to mobilize all of India to their cause. There were many leading figures who either used a cautious approach, or took no part in the movement. Some *ulama* of Deoband did not accept the non-Quraysh *Khilafat* of the Ottoman emperor, and Shi'i Muslims and the Ahmadis also questioned the legitimacy of the Ottoman right to the *Khilafat*.[89] Furthermore, the aims of the *Khilafat*

[86] Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, 8. It is interesting to note that the *Khilafat* Movement also involved women, and one Bi Amman (the mother of an Aligarh leader, Mohammad Ali), veiled in her *burqa*, was perhaps the first Muslim woman to address a political gathering of both men and women while filling in for her son.
[87] Minault, *The Khilafat Movement*, p. 9.
[88] Qureshi, "The Indian Khilafat," 161. Gandhi's non-cooperation experiment was a result of the tactics he and other leaders used during the *Khilafat* Movement.
[89] Qureshi, "The Indian Khilafat," 162-63. Ashraf Ali Thanwi (1863-1943) did not support the movement.

Movement were not congruent with the nationalistic goals of both the Turks and the Arabs.[90]

Though the *Khilafat* Movement failed to achieve its goals, it did allow Indian Muslims to experiment with political organization and achieve a certain level of political consciousness. Due to the movement Muslim leaders of India also realized that "the solution to their problem lay neither in narrow nationalism nor doctrinaire "universal" Islamism, but in some kind of Islamic "League of Nations." It was within the concept of this multi-national neo-pan-Islamism…that Iqbal evolved the theory of Pakistan."[91] The *Khilafat* Movement was a significant event during the nationalist awakening in India, and the pan-Islamic, or neo-pan-Islamic sentiment must have influenced the imagination of Iqbal and guided his philosophy of rejuvenating Islamic culture and pride. Before he left for the Second Round Table Conference held in London (September - December 1931) Iqbal gave an interview to *The Bombay Chronicle* in the fall of 1931. Iqbal defined his conception of Pan-Islamism in that interview and noted that the sense in which Jamaluddin Afghani used it was political in nature – for Afghanistan, Persia and Turkey to unite against an aggressive Europe. However, in Iqbal's view the idea was more than just political, it was a social experiment. To Iqbal, Pan-Islamism was Pan-Humanism, as taught by the Prophet Muhammad. He goes on to say that, "indeed the word Pan ought to be dropped from the phrase Pan-Islamism, for Islamism is an expression which

[90] Qureshi, "The Indian Khilafat," 159. The Arabs wanted independence from the Ottoman Empire and the Turks wanted to establish a Turkish state, giving up their imperial past. In March 1924, the Turks themselves abolished the *Khilafat* because it was an institution at odds with a nationalistic Turkey (p. 154).
[91] Qureshi, "The Indian Khilafat," 168.

completely covers the meaning I have mentioned above."[92] The knowledge of this historical context in which Muslims of India were creating some sense of Islamic nationalism is crucial to understanding the driving forces behind Iqbal's worldview and philosophy, and to understanding his poetry.

II. Biographical Information:

Muhammad Iqbal was born on November 9, 1877, in Sialkot, a city in the province of Punjab, in northern India. His ancestors were Sapru clan Brahmins from Kashmir who converted to Islam in the fifteenth century.[93] Iqbal's grandfather migrated from Kashmir to Sialkot as a child.[94] His father was Nur Muhammad, who sold Kashmiri shawls and caps from a shop he ran from his home.[95] He was a pious man and interested in Islamic mysticism, and regularly held meetings at home where Islamic classics were read, giving Iqbal his first taste of Islamic mysticism.[96] His mother, Imam Bibi, was illiterate, but a wise and respected woman, who gave generously to the poor and the needy.[97] Her religious views were different from the mysticism of Nur Muhammad, nevertheless, they enjoyed a long and happy marriage.[98] Sheikh Muhammad Iqbal was

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[92] B.A. Dar, *Letters & Writings of Iqbal*, (Karachi: Iqbal Academy, 1967), 57-57.
[93] Khurran Ali Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life and Our Times*, (Nottingham: Libredux Publishing, 2014), 16.
- Baba Loal Hajj was the ancestor who converted to Islam (p. 170).
[94] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 170.
[95] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 17.
[96] Muntasir Mir, *Makers of Islamic Civilization: Iqbal*. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. and Oxford University Press India, 2006), 1.
- Nur Muhammad did not have any formal education, but he could read Urdu and Persian. He spent time in the company of scholars and mystics who called him the "unlettered philosopher." (p. 1). According to Iqbal's son Javed, Iqbal did not eat beef because of his Brahman ancestors' reverence for the cow (p. 16).
[97] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 2.
[98] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 17.

the fourth child. He had an older brother, Ata Muhammad, and two older sisters, Fatima and Talay. After Iqbal, his parents had two more daughters, Karim and Zainab.[99]

At the age of four Iqbal started going to a mosque to learn the Qur'an. At five he became the student of Sayyid Mir Hasan (1844-1929), who headed a *madrasa* (religious school) in Sialkot. Mir Hasan was also a distinguished scholar of not just religion, but literature as well. Under the tutelage of Mir Hasan, Iqbal gained an Islamic education and also developed a refined literary taste. Despite being the head of a *madrasa* Mir Hasan supported European, secular education for Indian Muslims, along with Islamic education.[100] He later convinced Iqbal's father to enroll Iqbal in Scotch Mission College in Sialkot where Mir Hassan held the position of Arabic professor. Iqbal earned his faculty of Arts diploma in 1895, the highest degree offered at that college at that time. It was at Scotch Mission College that Iqbal started composing poetry; he was only fifteen or sixteen years old. His first poetry *ustād* (mentor, teacher) [by correspondence] was Mirza Dagh Dehlavi (1831-1905), also known as the 'Nightingale of India.'[101]

By the age of sixteen, in 1893, Iqbal entered an arranged marriage with Karim Bibi. Karim Bibi was of Kashmiri descent and came from a wealthier family than Iqbal's; she was also a few years older than him. They had two children together, a daughter named Meraj Bano (1896-1915) and a son, Aftab (1898-1979) who became estranged and completely broke off contact with his father in 1920. The couple eventually separated

[99] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 17.
[100] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 2. After the failure of the1857 uprising, and takeover of India by the British, many Muslims scholars of India discouraged Muslims from learning English, and getting a modern education
[101] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 3. Scotch Mission College was later renamed to Murray College, and is now known as the Government Murray College Sialkot.

after twenty years of marriage, but Iqbal provided for the maintenance of his estranged wife throughout his life.[102]

Iqbal went on to marry two other women, Sardar Begum in 1910 and Mukhtar Begum in 1913. Sardar Begum came from a Kashmiri family that lived in Lahore. They had their *nikah* (Muslim marriage) in 1910 when she was around eighteen years old and he about thirty-three. However, they did not cohabitate and consummate their marriage because soon after their *nikah* Iqbal started receiving anonymous letters claiming Sardar to be of questionable character. In 1913 Iqbal married Mukhtar Begum, a woman from Ludhiana, a town in eastern Punjab. Not long after this marriage Iqbal learned that the letters sullying Sardar's character were written maliciously by the father of one of her rejected suitors. With the permission of Mukhtar, Iqbal brought Sardar to live with them. Iqbal had two children with Sardar - Javid, a son, born in 1924, and a daughter, Munira, born in 1930. Iqbal became very fond of Sardar, the wife he had initially refused to bring home. She died in 1935, and sometime after her death Iqbal is reported to have said that, "her soul is in contact with me."[103] Iqbal's biographer Shafique writes that when Mukhtar died in 1924 during childbirth, Iqbal wrote to his elder brother Ata Muhammad and said: "To bring forth an ordinary human being into this world where he would not even live more than fifty or sixty years the nature gives so much pain to a weak woman."[104] This sheds light on Iqbal's views on gender and conveys to us that though he viewed women as weak in his poetry, he was not unsympathetic to women's suffering.

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[102] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 28-29.
- Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 4-5. Mir writes that Karim Bibi was three years older than Iqbal, and died eight years after his death.
[103] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 74-76.
[104] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 78.

In 1895, Iqbal left Sialkot and moved to Lahore to attend the prestigious Government College. He finished his BA degree in 1897, with the concentration of English, philosophy, and Arabic. Two years later, in 1899, he obtained an MA in philosophy from the same institution. After finishing his masters degree Iqbal took the appointment of MacLeod Arabic Reader at Oriental College in Lahore. He taught history, philosophy, and economics, while continuing his research and translation projects. Iqbal stayed at Oriental College intermittently through 1904.[105] While he was teaching at Oriental College, he was encouraged by Sir Thomas Arnold (1864-1930) and wrote a research paper on the "Muslim mystic 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili's concept of the Perfect Man."[106]

Iqbal's beloved mentor Thomas Arnold left for England in 1904, with Iqbal following him the very next year. In 1905 Iqbal entered Trinity College at Cambridge as a research scholar.[107] While at Trinity College he was concurrently enrolled as a student of law at Lincoln's Inn in London and registered as a doctoral student at Munich University. Iqbal received his BA from Cambridge in June 1907, and in November he was awarded a PhD by Munich University. His PhD thesis was on the development of metaphysics in Persia. By 1908 Iqbal had been admitted to the bar in London and had published his doctoral thesis.[108]

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[105] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 5. While teaching at Oriental College Iqbal also briefly held the position of assistant professor of English at Government College, and at another college in Lahore as well.
[106] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 5. Sir Thomas Arnold taught at Aligarh College before joining Government College in 1898.
[107] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 7.
[108] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 8.
- Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 8-9. With his academic pursuits being his main focus in Europe Iqbal neglected writing poetry. He also felt that with its decadent themes and stock expressions Urdu poetry was not

In Europe, Iqbal established close friendships with two women. The first was Atiya Fyzee, whom he met in London in 1907. Atiya was a liberal aristocrat from Bombay and was keenly interested in Indian classical music and Persian poetry. Although there was speculation about Iqbal and Atiya being romantically involved, Khurram Ali Shafique believes they were just close friends who had developed a mutual understanding and respect, although they did not start out that way. Atiya had this to say about Iqbal when she was first getting to know him: "He was much fond of himself as a man primarily – and a great scholar after. There was no getting out of it." She recollects what she thought of Iqbal from first impressions and says: "My first impression of 'Iqbal' was that he was 'complex' – a mixture of good and evil, extremely self-contained and fond of his own opinion – a bad sign, I said to myself." Atiya's understanding of how Iqbal viewed women does not paint a very flattering picture of him; she believed that Iqbal was someone who regarded women as a necessary evil in some ways.[109]

The second woman Iqbal befriended was Emma Wegenast whom he met in Heidelberg in the summer of 1907, when he went to Germany in connection with his doctorate. Emma was a language coach and taught German to foreign students. Shafique believes that Iqbal became emotionally attached to Emma and she became his muse for many of his most moving love poems. Shafique further claims that the two may have wanted to get married but were not able to because Emma's family did not allow her to

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equipped to address the task of nation building in India. He even considered giving up writing poetry but his mentor Thomas Arnold persuaded him to continue his poetry career. Upon its publication Iqbal dedicated his doctoral thesis to Arnold.

[109] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 50-51.

go settle in British India. Sometime after returning to India Iqbal wrote the following line to Emma in a letter: " I've forgotten all my German, except for one word: Emma!"[110]

Iqbal's sojourn in Europe helped shape his political views for the rest of his years. Before he left for Europe Iqbal promoted Indian nationalism, he believed in the possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity because loyalty to one's country could trump religious differences.[111] However, in Europe he witnessed the animosity and mistrust between European nations as a result of territorial and ethnic nationalism. Watching such discord in Europe Iqbal became the champion of the ideological universalism that Islam offered.[112] He started doubting that Hindus and Muslims could exist together, especially as Hindu leaders like Gandhi breathed into anti-colonial rhetoric a discrete religious spirit that Muslims found alienating. According to Thomas Metcalf and Barbara Metcalf, Gandhi's vision of "true independence" was based on *Hind Swaraj* (1909) and he described the ideal society as analogous to the mythical kingdom of Lord Ram. Gandhi wrote:

> In my opinion swaraj and Ramarajya are one and the same thing… We call a state Ramarajya when both the ruler and his subjects are straightforward, when both are pure in heart, when both are inclined towards self-sacrifice, when both exercise restraint and self-control while enjoying worldly pleasures, and, when the relationship between the two is as good as that between a father and son.[113]

The Metcalfs point out that although Gandhi was willing to love his opponents, he was only willing to do so on his own terms. And that "his attitude towards large segments of

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[110] Shafique, *Iqbal: His Life*, 51-52.
[111] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 9.
[112] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 10.
- Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 11. According to Iqbal it was during his time in England that he truly became interested in understanding the decline of the historic Muslim community.
[113] Metcalf, Barbara D. and Thomas R. Metcalf. *A Concise History of Modern India, 2nd edition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 172.

society – Muslims, women, and untouchables… - was defined by an inability or unwillingness to accept the legitimacy of grievances which did not accord with his conception of a proper moral order."[114] It seems that Iqbal wanted Muslims to maintain their distinct religious and cultural identity in response to the exclusivist rhetoric that was coming from Gandhi and the Indian National Congress.[115]

After returning to India in July of 1908 Iqbal started his law practice in Lahore. He also taught philosophy at Government College, his alma mater. Subsequent events around the Islamic world – occupation of Libya by Italy, annexation of Morocco by France, and the loss of the Ottoman Empire's Balkan territories – led Iqbal to address the plight of the Muslims, not just in India, but throughout the Islamic world.[116] Iqbal's first poetry book, *Asrar-i Khudi*, was published in 1915. Although he had been publishing his Urdu poetry in periodicals for some time this volume was in Persian. Through his poetry in this volume Iqbal addresses the worldwide Muslim community (*ummah*), which became the focus of his attention. His major philosophical work *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* was published many years later in 1934.[117]

In the years following his return to India, Iqbal took a leading role in politics in the Muslim community. He was elected to the Punjab Legislative Council in 1926, and stayed a member till 1930. He was a leading figure of much import and shaped the course of the Muslim League, the largest political party in India to represent Muslims. In

[114] Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India,* 173.
[115] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 12.
[116] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 10.
[117]Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 11. Before Iqbal left for Europe he wrote the National Song of India saying, *we are Indians, and India is our country*; however, after returning from Europe, and having changed his views he wrote the Islamic Community's Song, in which he said, *We are Muslims, the whole world is our country*.

December of 1930 he introduced the idea of Pakistan in his presidential address at a meeting of the All India Muslim League in Allahabad. In that address Iqbal called for a Muslim India to be created out of the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and N.W.F.P. (North West Frontier Province) where Muslims were in the majority.[118] It was also he who persuaded Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who was to become the founder of Pakistan, to leave England, and return to India in order to lead the political movement on behalf of the Muslims of India.[119]

Though Iqbal was well respected and well known in the Indian Muslim community he was not immune from criticism. He drew the ire of many when he accepted knighthood, and when he composed poems to celebrate the coronation of George V, and to commemorate the death of Queen Victoria. He was also criticized for not lending his support to the civil disobedience movement, and for the audacity with which he addressed God in his poetry. For example, in his most notorious poem *Shikvāh,* he addresses God with a word (*harjā'ī,* one who is in multiple places simultaneously) that has echoes of prostitute. He was fortunate in that he had plenty of seemingly pious Muslims, ranging from religious scholars to literary figures, defending him. In present day Pakistan he is seen as such a legend that if one recites one of his verses in support of her position it is akin to having the last word in an argument or discussion.[120] Of course his *harjā'ī* is rarely discussed!

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[118] Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12. It is because of this declaration perhaps, that in popular historical lore in Pakistan Iqbal is celebrated as the person who first envisioned a separate nation for the Muslims of India.
[119] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 14-15.
[120] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 16.

III. Selected Poetry On Women:

Muhammad Iqbal wrote extensively on a pan-Islamic community as well as the Muslim community in India. He composed poetry in which he offered his views on what he envisioned was the place of Muslims in the world and how they might reclaim the glory of past Muslim communities.

In the section of poems titled '*aurat* (Woman), which appears in Iqbal's poetry volume called *ẓarb-i-kalīm* (The Stroke of Moses), published in 1937, Iqbal shares his views on the question of women, and addresses their issues from multiple angles.[121] The language that Iqbal uses in many of his poems, like the couplet with which this chapter begins, is ambiguous and veiled, and it is often difficult to discern what truly lies behind that veil – the true feelings of the poet regarding women's oppression and their roles and obligation.

He begins this section by addressing the issue as it stands in Europe. Though Iqbal lived in Europe from 1905-1908, and was also educated there, his poetry reflects his negative views on many components of western civilization. One could even argue that he saw the rise of feminism in Europe in the early twentieth century as detrimental to order in society. In the following poem Iqbal shares how he feels about the western man vis-à-vis the role and status of women in society:

[121] Muhammad Iqbal, *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, (Delhi: Markazi Maktabah-e-Islami, 1996). All the poetry has been selected from this volume, *zarb-e-kalīm*, primarily from the section on women, and one poem each from a section on Islam and Muslims, and another section on education, which also includes Iqbal's thoughts on his philosophy of *khudī* (selfhood).

mard-e-farang - Western Man[122]

hazār bār ḥakīmoṅ nē is ko suljhāyā
magar yah masa'lah-e-zan rahā vahīṅ kā vahīṅ
quṣūr zan kā nahīṅ hai kuch is ḳharābī mēṅ
gavāh us kī sharāfat peh hēṅ mah-o-parvīṅ
fasād kā hai farangī ma'āshrat mēṅ ẕuhūr
keh mard sādah hai bēcārah zan shanās nahīṅ

A thousand times men of wisdom have tried to solve this
But this issue of the women remained where it had started
It is not any fault of the woman in this deficiency
Testifying to her honor are the moon and the stars
Mischief has raised its head in the culture of the west
For man is a simpleton - the poor fellow is not acquainted with women

Iqbal acknowledges that when it comes to women there remains a question that has not been resolved. However, he does not clarify what this question is. All the reader is made aware of is that there is a lingering issue, a question surrounding women that wise men have tried to address a thousand times, leading to no resolution. Iqbal witnessed the feminist movement progress during his stay in England and had strong opinions on women's equality and their right to vote (discussed further below). The mischief that Iqbal is referring to is perhaps the feminist movement activities in Europe in the early twentieth century. Though the woman is virtuous, as the moon and stars can attest, it's the western culture that has led them astray.[123]

Women held differing views during the early twentieth century on how they should go about promoting women's rights. The two main ideologies, or feminist beliefs,

[122] Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 464.
[123] Of course, putting a woman on a pedestal is not a solution to the equality problem. In fact is quite the opposite. As Partha Chatterjee explains, "as with all hegemonic forms of exercising dominance, … patriarchy combined coercive authority with the subtle force of persuasion. This was expressed most generally in the inverted ideological form of the relation of power between the sexes: the adulation of woman as goddess or as mother (1993, p. 130)."

that attracted followers were: the 'equality feminism' which was based on the belief that women and men were equal, and the other point of view, and the 'new feminism' wing held the belief that women were equal but also different from men. The equal rights (or equality) feminists who were influenced by writers and feminists such as John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft saw the right to vote as essential to gaining equality with men.[124]

The Suffragette movement was growing stronger and even getting militant in the early 1900s. The Pankhurst family from Manchester founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903 in order to push for women's rights. The WSPU was not alone, several other organizations such as the Women's Freedom League, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and the Actresses' Franchise League also fought for women's right to vote.[125] The suffragettes took on to heckling politicians at public meetings and organizing mass marches and demonstrations in order to get noticed.[126] However, in the face of opposition and lack of response from the British government the suffragettes turned to acts of violence such as smashing shop windows and even burning down houses of ministers who were opposed to the suffragettes' cause.[127] Other acts of violence included women trying to burn down a crowded theater in Dublin, and one

[124] Clare Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women: Post-Suffrage Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2014), 35-36.
[125] Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 75.
[126] Walters, *Feminism*, 76.
[127] Walters, *Feminism*, 80.

woman, Emily Wilding Davison, thrust herself on the track on Derby Day 1913, and gave her life for the cause of women's voting rights.[128]

Though Iqbal had returned from England in 1908 he would have also been keenly aware of the propaganda machine that the suffragettes used, making good use of the new medium of photography. Images of mass demonstrations and protests would have been available to him via newspapers. Perhaps the most effective images were like that of Emmeline Pankhurst being arrested in 1914 by two angry looking men and being forcefully removed from the King's path when she tried to give him a petition.[129]

A notebook of stray reflections that Iqbal started keeping in 1910 provides some insight on his views on women's demand for the vote. Writing on the topic of polygamy he explains that:

> Of the two social evils-divorce and polygamy-(evils if universalised), the latter is certainly the lesser. But the avoidance of divorce is perhaps not the only justification for this institution; it is partly a concession to the nature of the male who, according to this institution, is allowed to indulge in his inclination for variety-without escaping scot-free from the responsibility arising out of this indulgence. In England the individual does in some cases indulge in such inclinations, but the law leaves him absolutely free from the responsibility which may arise from his sexual freedom. He is not responsible for the education of the children he produces. Nor can such children inherit their father. The consequence, in some cases, are awful.[130]

Juxtaposing polygamy and monogamy he further explains that:

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[128] Walters, *Feminism*, 82.
- Walters, *Feminism*, 85. Not all women associated with the movement believed in such tactics and denounced violence and martyrdom. Teresa Bilington, a close associate of Emmeline Pankhurst, spoke against violent measures and held the view that martyrdom was a position that reduced the women to be seen as victims instead of rebels fighting for their rights. In 1918, women over the age of 30 were given the vote, and in 1928 women won the right to vote on equal terms with men.
[129] Walters, *Feminism*, 81.
[130] Javid Iqbal, ed. *Stray Reflections: A Notebook of Allama Iqbal* (Lahore: Sh. Ghulam Ali & Sons, 1961), 62-63.

> …perhaps the greatest criticism on monogamy is the existence of the superfluous women in several European countries where various social forces and political nature are trending to embrace the number of women who cannot secure husbands. They cannot become mothers, and consequently they are driven to seek interests other than the bringing up of children. They are compelled to "conceive" ideas instead of children. Recently they have conceived the inspiring idea of "votes for women." This is really an attempt on the part of the superfluous woman, or, if you like, an attempt on her behalf, to create "interests" for her in the sphere of politics. If a society cannot allow their women to produce and bring up children they must give them something else to be occupied with. The Suffragist movement in Europe is at bottom a cry for husbands rather than votes. To me it is nothing more than a riot of the unemployed.[131]

Suffrage was not the only fight women were fighting in the early twentieth century; women had other demands as well, which were not just about equality but about addressing the differences between men and women. Eleanor Rathbone, the president of National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship argued that women should not just demand equality with men, but should demand "what women need to fulfill the potentialities of their own natures and to adjust themselves to the circumstances of their own lives." Some of the laws that women sought to get passed concerned divorce laws, the guardianship of children, and issues dealing with treatment of prostitution. Other societal issues that women thought needed reform were those of the end of discrimination against women in civil service, laws against assault on children, and most importantly, equal pay, especially for women teachers.[132] Novelist Rebecca West's strong comments on the meager salaries of female teachers help us understand the sentiments of women when she says, "the real reason why women teachers are paid less highly than men who are performing the same work is the desire felt by the mass of men that women in general

[131] Iqbal, ed. *Stray Reflections*, 64-65.
[132] Walters, *Feminism*, 88. In 1919, the Sex Discrimination (Removal) Act was passed, which opened up civil service professions to women. In 1923, Matrimonial Causes Act gave women equal rights to seek divorce.

should be subjected to every possible disadvantage."[133] Such comments also shed light on the social context and help us understand that women did not just feel that their rights were being dismissed by men but rather that these rights were deliberately being denied.

Economic independence and equal pay were among the primary concerns for women, as well as a necessity, in order for women to feel secure and "fulfill their potentialities." Virginia Woolf voices this sentiment in her essay, *A Room of One's Own*, in which she shares that, it took economic independence in order for her to be who she became; that "of the two – the vote and the money – the money…seemed infinitely the more important." [134] Representation for women through the ballot was definitely important for women, but Woolf recognized that without economic independence women would remain limited in what all they could accomplish.

Iqbal continues his commentary on European civilization and its gender dynamics in the next poem in which he takes a rather conservative view of the role of women. It would appear that he views reproduction as one of the defining roles for women.

ēk savāl - A Question[135]

koī pūchē ḥakīm-e-yaurap sē
hind-o-yūnāṅ haiṅ jīs kē ḥalqah bagosh
kyā yahī hai ma'āshrat kā kamāl?
mard bēkār o zan tahī āġhosh

Somebody ask the wise man of Europe

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[133] Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights*, 37.
[134] Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own." In *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, edited by Miriam Schneir, 344-355, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 348. In this essay Woolf is addressing the issue of women in fiction, and how more women can add female voices and experiences in literature. Her assertion is that every woman needs education, economic independence, and a room of her own, to sit and write.
[135] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 464.

He who has India and Greece wrapped around his finger
Is this the wonder of civilization?
Man is unemployed[136] and woman childless

This poem is yet another example in which Iqbal challenges the West and questions their claims of greatness. Though Europe has been able to colonize the peoples of other nations Iqbal views their successes as hollow. For all its greatness Europe does not have order when it comes to gender dynamics and relations between men and women. With his incredulity about European civilization's superiority he clearly places the nations that Europe has colonized as equal or greater than European nations.[137] Perhaps the most poignant of Iqbal's observations can be seen in the last verse where he labels the European man as unemployed, while he classifies the woman as childless. Since the word he uses to describe the European man can also mean useless, or idle, one must wonder if he is alluding to the European man's neglect in impregnating women and siring more children. It is quite telling of Iqbal's beliefs on women when he chooses to focus on the lack of reproduction by women instead of any number of other differences between a western and an eastern woman.

For Eleanor Rathbone, a new feminist, birth control was an important issue and she was able to put that issue to the forefront during her 1925 presidential address to National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship. The new feminists believed that artificial birth control was an issue that was connected to women's "right to self-determination" and also "a way of achieving emancipation [of] motherhood." A woman

[136] The word *bēkār* can also mean useless or idle.
[137] It is unclear why Iqbal uses Greece as an example of nations colonized by Britain. Perhaps he is alluding to the fact that the English have positioned themselves in a position of higher status than the great ancient civilizations of Greece and India.

who could not have control over the reproductive function of her body is resigned to bearing several children during the best years of her life, hence reducing her chances of self-actualization.[138] Having knowledge and access to birth control was such an important issue for new feminists because it meant women could have the freedom of choice whether to become mothers or not. With access to birth control women would have self-determination as far as motherhood was concerned.[139]

Advocates of birth control were also concerned about maternal mortality, which was one of the leading causes of death for mothers of childbearing age.[140] In 1926, at the Labour Party Conference, one advocate, Dora Russell, compared the rates of mortality linked to childbirth with death rates among men who worked in the most dangerous trades. She claimed that it was four times more dangerous for a woman to go through the birthing process than it was for a man to work in the mines, which was the most dangerous of occupations for men.[141]

Birth control and maternal mortality were such important issues to women that they found their way into literature as well. In what is perhaps considered her finest work, Winifred Holtby portrays maternal death in the novel *South Riding* (published in 1936). The novel is about a woman, Annie Holly, who is married to a laborer, and has six children with him. Though already burdened with the care of several children she cannot

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[138] Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights*, 38-39.

[139] Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights*, 40-41. The concept of emancipation of motherhood meant that the work of childrearing that mothers perform should have value just like any labor. Furthermore, mother's lives were considered expendable and they needed to have avenues to protect their health.

[140] Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights*, 44. Though not a disease, childbirth was ranked first among the diseases which killed mothers within the childbearing age range.

[141] Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights*, 45.

refuse sexual relations to her husband. Despite having been advised by doctors against further pregnancies she gets pregnant. In a failed attempt to terminate the pregnancy she harms herself enough that she dies a slow and lingering death.[142]

At the same time the birth control and contraceptive movement was taking place across the Atlantic in the United States as well. Margaret Sanger was one of the leading advocates of contraception. She had been a nurse and had worked with women in the slums of New York. She argued in favor of contraception in a pamphlet called *Family Limitation*. She believed it was an important issue that needed attention because it provided a way for average women to have mutually satisfying sexual lives with men.[143]

Iqbal did not support the women's movement for emancipation in the West. The following quote shows his views on the developments that were taking place in Europe to gain equality for women:

> The so called 'emancipation of the western woman' necessitated by western individualism and the peculiar economic situation produced by an unhealthy competition, is an experiment, in my opinion, likely to fail, not without doing incalculable harm, and creating extremely intricate social problems. Nor is the higher education of women likely to lead to any desirable consequences, in so far, at least, as the birth rate of a community is concerned. Experience has shown that the economic emancipation of women in the west has not, as expected, materially extended the production of wealth.[144]

Iqbal's views on the West and its "experiment" with women's emancipation can guide us in understanding his views on women in India. He believed that men and women had different roles to fulfill and that these roles should not be transgressed if humanity was to

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[142] Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights*, 42.
[143] Walters, *Feminism*, 91. Sanger left the United Sates in 1914, the day before she was to be tried under the Comstock Law of 1873, which made sending obscene material through mail a crime.
[144] Latif Ahmad Sherwani, ed. *Speeches, Writings and Statements of Iqbal*. 5th ed. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2005), 134. From his lecture "The Muslim Community – a Sociological Study" delivered at M.A.O. College, Aligarh, in the winter of 1910.

have order.[145] He is also clearly concerned with the birth rate of a community, specifically his Indian Muslim community, and does not want to see a decline in it.

In his poem *pardah*, Iqbal appears to be supporting the idea of veiling, or at least the idea of some kind of seclusion for women. His support of veiling and seclusion is by analyzing the nature of humanity and a person's inner self:

pardah - Veil[146]

> *bohat rang badlē sipehr-e-barīṅ nē*
> *ḳhudāyā yah duniyā jahāṅ thī vahīṅ hai*
> *tafāvut nah dēkha zan-o-shau mēṅ maiṅ nē*
> *voh khalvat nashīṅ hai yah jalvat nashīṅ hai*
> *abhi tak hai pardē mēṅ aulad-e-ādam*
> *kisī kī ḳhudī āshkārā nahīṅ hai*

The celestial sphere has changed many colors
Oh god! This world has remained where it was
I have not seen a change in husband and wife
She remains in private, he is out in public
All the offspring of Adam is still behind the veil
No one's self is apparent.

Iqbal observes that since time immemorial the position of humans has stayed the same. The relationship between husband and wife, man and woman, has remained the same. Though the woman is better suited for a more private life the man has had to be part of the public sphere. However, even the man, according to Iqbal's reasoning, is behind a veil. The fact that the man is able to, and does, live a public life does not mean that he does not wear masks and is not hidden. Even the one who is in the open is hidden, for all of Adam's offspring, or humanity, is behind a veil. The man who is in public hides his true nature; he masks his interior from those that may seek to exploit him and take

[145] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 129.
[146] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 465.

advantage of him, or those he would wish to deceive. The woman on the other hand, who is behind the veil, is actually at an advantage because she does not have to pretend to be who she is not. She can be true to herself and is not in need of wearing masks.

However, Iqbal's understanding might be questionable and the reasoning that a woman would be protected just because she is behind the veil, and secluded, is flawed. This type of reasoning does not take into account the fact that many women (and men too) cannot truly be themselves even in the privacy of their homes; this is especially true given the nature of extended family living situations in South Asia. A woman who moves into her in-laws' house after marriage to start her matrimonial life is not always at luxury to completely discard her masks even in the privacy of the home. She has to live up to expectations that she may not agree with and pretend to be gracious while being subservient. This is not entirely different from a man who may have to be subservient and gracious at work while secretly resenting having to do that.

Observing *pardah*, according to Iqbal, is tied to the honor and respect of the eastern women. In his 1931 interview with the *Liverpool Post*, while he attended the Second Round Table Conference, Iqbal compares western and eastern women and claims that European women have brought themselves down from the high pedestal that they used to occupy in society, whereas the eastern woman still has the same place of respect and honor. He further says that: "Woman, in fact, is the Lord's holiest creature. And her sex relationship necessitates that she must live immune from undesirable eyes."[147] He further explains his views on *pardah* as being based on Islam and the Qur'an, which lays

[147] Dar, *Letters & Writings*, 64.

down several rules for the segregation of women, and that observing *pardah* is just one of those rules.[148]

Having privacy and being in seclusion is the way in which Iqbal thinks the woman can fulfill her potential. In the next poem he addresses the virtues of privacy and seclusion, although his views seem to be problematic and counterproductive to the development of any individual:

ḳhalvat - Seclusion[149]

rusvā kiyā is daur ko jalvat kī havas nē
raushan hai nigah ā'inah-e-dil hai mukkadar
baṛh jātā hai jab żauq-e-naẕar apnī ḥadoṅ sē
ho jātē haiṅ ufkār parāgandah-o-abtar!
āġhosh-e-ṣadaf jis kē naṣīboṅ maiṅ nahīṅ
voh qaṭrah-e-nīsāṅ kabhī bantā nahīṅ gauhar
ḳhalvat mēṅ ḳhudī hotī hai ḳhudgīr walēkin
ḳhalvat nahīṅ ab dair-o-ḥaram mēṅ bhī muyassar!

This era has been disgraced by the greed to be seen
Glances are lit up but the mirror of the heart is sullied
When the desire to see exceeds its limits
Thoughts are scattered and ruined
He who is not fated to be in the embrace of *sadaf* (oyster shell)
That dewdrop never transforms into a pearl
It is in seclusion that the self realizes itself/reaches its fruition, however,
Seclusion now is not possible even in the monastery or the Ka'ba

Iqbal's view that women need the protection of seclusion to reach their potential is made evident through this poem. He targets what is visible and in sight as something that is corrupted and that desire for being seen has become a vice. In order to be seen one needs another – the one who sees. By that reasoning even the act of seeing is a culprit

[148] Dar, *Letters & Writings*, *65*.
[149] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 465.

that leads people to lust; it prevents the truth by distorting people's ability to look within themselves and to see what their heart is showing them.

The heart in this poem represents passion, which is essential for the nourishment of the soul and for one to realize their selfhood. Being exposed in the world leads to lustful distractions that limit the ability of one's heart to guide the person with sincerity. With the corrupting influence of society the heart's sullied mirror reflects a corrupted or distorted self back to the person, hindering one's ability to ascertain what is needed for the growth of her soul, and for the nourishment of the self.

Without the quiet that privacy and seclusion allow it is difficult to dream and have grand ideas, for ideas are easily lost to the chaos and distractions of public spaces. Iqbal uses the metaphor of a pearl that will not become a brilliant gem if it does not have the seclusion provided to it by the embrace of the *sadaf* (oyster shell). In fact, privacy is essential to overcome one's base desires driven by ego. Transcendence of the heart over one's ego is not something that religion or the place of worship can even offer, it has to come from within, aided by solitude, seclusion, and privacy.

Though Iqbal tries to make a case for the seclusion of women and how it would aid them in realizing their full potentials, he fails to take into account that in order to truly develop as a person one needs interaction with the outside world. Even though Virginia Woolf argued that a woman needs privacy for creativity, the origins of the thoughts and ideas that drive that creativity come through contact with the outside world. By arguing that women can fulfill their potential by remaining secluded Iqbal denies them the same opportunities he had himself, and fails to acknowledge that his own development

required the freedom to travel, and to get educated in various institutions, in multiple different countries.

One can see from previous examples that Iqbal does not condone the women's liberation movement in Europe and hence does not want to see Indian women follow their example. However, Iqbal does seem to view women as agents of change and values their contribution. In the next poem he acknowledges the worth and value of women even though they are mostly hidden from society:

'aurat - Woman[150]

vujūd-e-zan sē hai taṣvīr-e-kā'ināt mēṅ rang
usī kē sāz sē hai zindagī kā soz-e-darūd
sharf mēṅ baṛh kē ṡurraiyā sē musht-e-ḳhāk us kī
keh har sharf hai usī durj kā dur-e-maknūṅ
mukālmāt-e-falāṭūṅ nah likh sakī lēkin
usī kē sho'lē sē ṭūṭā sharār-e-aflāṭūṅ

The existence of woman colors the expanse of the universe
By her instrument alone there is life's passion
Handful of dust that comes from her is more exalted than *Surraiyā*[151]
That each honor is the hidden pearl's casket
Although she couldn't compose the dialogues of Plato
It was her spark that could quench the flame of Plato[152]

It would seem like Iqbal's thought process in regard to women's role through history is not too different from the views of the American historian and feminist Mary Ritter Beard (1876-1958). Beard comments on how the contributions of women have been neglected in recorded history and that:

[150] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 466.
[151] Dar, *Letters & Writings*, 64. In an interview with *The Liverpool Post*, while Iqbal was attending the Second Round Table Conference in 1931 he comments on the status of eastern women and says: "Woman, in fact, is the Lord's holiest creature."
- The Pleiades, the seven-star cluster in the constellation Taurus.
[152] Perhaps that it was the woman who gave tenderness to the ideas of Plato.

> The narrative of history must be reopened, must be widened to take in the whole course of civilisation as well as war, politics, gossip and economics. Woman and her work can best be understood in relation to the total process that has brought mankind from primitive barbarism to its present state. Her moods and aspirations have their roots in the very beginning of society and they have been nourished through the centuries by opportunities of her own making as well as by those of man's contrivance.[153]

Like Beard, Iqbal acknowledges that women have had a hand in shaping the destiny of humankind and have played a crucial role in the civilizing project of humanity. Iqbal understands that even though we are unable to gauge the accomplishments of women at the surface level, they have been the spirit behind the accomplishments of men. The fact that Iqbal still wants women to remain behind the scenes is quite problematic however, and Mary Ritter Beard would certainly not agree with him in keeping women in the background.

Even after an acknowledgment of women's behind-the-scenes role he does not champion or in any way push for women's role to be more visible. Iqbal describes the woman in such grand terms as having colored the expanse of the universe with her existence, and how even a handful of dust from her is more exalted than the star dust of the Pleiades, but fails to suggest a solution to this willful neglect of women's accomplishments. In the second verse he writes how there is life's passion by her instrument alone. Perhaps he is commenting on what he saw as women's primary role in society – to reproduce and be agents for the continuation of life of the human species generally, and more specifically, the continuation of the Muslim community.

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[153] Mary Ritter Beard, "On Understanding Women," In *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, edited by Miriam Schneir, 356-368. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). 364-65.

He further comments on the virtues and talents of Woman and how she has the spark and the flame that could rival and even surpass the wisdom of Plato. However, she could not compose the wisdom of the likes of Plato because she wasn't given the opportunity to do so. Having acknowledged her abilities Iqbal fails to comment on why the woman has not been able to compose the dialogues of Plato, or why the works of her wisdom and her contributions have been disregarded and have not been recorded in the annals of history.

Iqbal had stated in his earlier poem *mard-e-farang* (Western Man) that many wise men have tried to solve the gender issue in Europe but have not been successful in doing so. Here, on the topic of women's liberation, Iqbal seems to have the same attitude and is dismissive about the role that men and leaders of the Indian Muslim community like him can play to empower women:

āzādī-e-nisvāṅ- Women's Liberation[154]

> *is beḥas kā kuch faiṣlah maiṅ kar nahīṅ saktā*
> *go khūb samajhtā hūṅ keh yah zahar hai, voh qand*
> *kyā fā'idah kuch keh kē banūṅ aur bhī ma'tūb*
> *pehlē hī ḳhafā mujh sē haiṅ tehżīb kē farzand*
> *is rāz ko 'aurat kī baṣīrat hī karē fāsh*
> *majbūr haiṅ, ma'żūr haiṅ, mardān-e-ḳhardmand*
> *kyā cīz hai ārā'ish-o-qīmat mēṅ ziyādah*
> *āzādī-e-nisvāṅ keh zamurrad kā guluband?*

I cannot settle this debate at all
Though I fully comprehend that this is a poison
- And that is sugar
What is the benefit if having said something
- I should become the object of someone's displeasure
These scions of culture are already displeased with me
This secret can only be revealed by woman's insight

[154] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 466.

The wise men are helpless and excusable
Which is worth more in adoration and value
Women's liberation or an emerald necklace?

Iqbal acknowledges that the current state of affairs is poisonous but that he has no answer as to how this debate can be settled. He further seems to be washing his hands of the matter by stating that it is not worth it for him to say something and attract the ire of those he calls the scions of culture. It would seem like he is referring to those progressive men (and women) who had started to discuss women's rights and had made the gender question part of the narrative of nationalism and independence from colonial rule.

In his 1910 *Stray Reflections* notebook Iqbal writes: "Our young prophets of social reform think that a few doses of education on western lines will revitalise the dead Musalman woman, and make her tear her ancient shrouds. This is perhaps true. But I fear, finding herself naked, she will have once more to hide her body from the eyes of these young prophets."[155] Even though Iqbal was very much involved in the nationalist debate, he seems to avoid taking any part in addressing the question of what role women could, and would play, in an independent, post-colonial India. He clearly does not see eye-to-eye with those progressive men and women who supported modern education for women, since he thinks this education will create its own problems for women.

Worth pointing out here is that he also acknowledges that only women can solve the question of women, and excuses wise *men* as being helpless, just like the philosophers and wise men of Europe who had tried to address the question of gender differences. Another point of interest is that even though Iqbal claims to not take any part in the

[155] Iqbal, ed. *Stray Reflections*, 124.

discussion on women's liberation he speaks volumes by using the rhetorical devices and conventions in his poetry. He relates the issue of women's liberation to order in society, as he had done in the poem *Western Man*, he seems to equate women's liberation movement to mischief, and anathema to societal order. To this end, Iqbal concludes this poem by posing a question: what is worth more in adoration and value, women's liberation or an emerald necklace? To critics of Iqbal, and progressive thinkers, the answer would of course be the liberation of women, which is worth more than all the jewels in the world. It would appear (and supported by his other poems and general views on women) that he believes it is more conducive to order in society to have woman play a domestic role. She should have an emerald necklace around her neck, instead of being liberated and free from the jeweled collar (the symbol of her subjugation). However, if Iqbal is directing that question towards women and asking for their opinion it would be a step in the direction of acknowledging women, because Indian women's opinion did not matter much at the time when Iqbal was writing.

Iqbal further elaborates his views on women in this poem in which he places woman under the dominion of man:

'aurat ki ḥifāzat - Woman's Protection[156]

ik zindah ḥaqīqat mirē sīnē mēṅ hai mastūr
kyā samjhē gā voh jis kī ragoṅ mēṅ hai lahū sard
nē pardah, nah ta'līm, na'ī ho keh purānī
nisvāniyat-e-zan kā nigehbāṅ hai faqat mard
jis qaum nē is zindah ḥaqīqat ko nah pāyā
us qaum kā ḳhurshīd bohat jald hu'ā zard

A living truth lies hidden in my breast

[156] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 467.

What will he understand who has cold blood in the veins?
Neither veil nor education, whether it's new or old
Only man is a safe keeper of woman's femininity
That community which has not understood this living reality
The sun of that community has set

The poet claims for himself the mantle of one who is the bearer of a living truth; no one with cold blood in the veins (with the absence of this knowledge) can understand and fully comprehend what Iqbal can. He seems to be communicating once again with the progressives who were working tirelessly for some semblance of women's equality in India. His depiction of these progressives, with cold blood in their veins, is very telling of how he must have felt about people working for women's liberation. He views them almost as reptilian, and possibly without forethought, acting on their baser instincts; or perhaps they are just imitating the West. Either way, he does not hold their intellect in high regard. Iqbal, and those like him, are the ones who have the gift of forethought and are prescient enough to understand what is good for the Indian Muslim community in the long run – the protection that man can offer a woman. This is really a man's problem. Man has created the problem so he has to solve it. Such reasoning is dismissive of the input that women may have to offer in the matter in order to solve an issue that affects them the most.

No veil, or any kind of education, whether old or new, can protect a woman. Women may acquire religious education, or modern education. Neither, according to Iqbal, can protect their character. It is not clear what he means by the term "woman's character," though it would appear that he might be referring to their morality and the expectation on women to be chaste and subservient to patriarchal authority. Such a

reading is not too far fetched considering that he uses words such as mischief when he describes western society and the demand of western women for equality.

Iqbal is concerned about the Muslim community as a whole, and especially the Indian Muslims, whom he addresses in many of his poems. He reminds Indian Muslims that man must be the protector of woman, and that whichever community or nation forgets this cannot last long or achieve greatness. This sentiment is also in line with his views on western culture and European nations, which he views as corrupt and on the verge of decline.[157] Iqbal does not want the Muslim man to become useless like the western man, who is unable to protect the woman and her character, i.e. control her.[158]

One of the reasons for the supposed decline of western culture, in Iqbal's view, is western education. In the following poem he comments on the effect of western education on women:

'aurat aur ta'līm - Woman and Education[159]

tehżīb-e-farangī hai agar marg-e-umūmat
hai ḥazrat-e-insāṅ kē liyē is kā ṡamar maut
jis ilm kī tāṡīr sē zan hotī hai nāzan
kehtē haiṅ usī ilm ko arbāb-e-naẕar maut
bēgānah rahē dīṅ sē agar madrasah-e-zan
hai 'ishq-o-muhabbat kē liyē 'ilm-o-hunar maut

If western civilization is the death of the community
The fruit of it is death for the noble human
That education whose impact causes a woman to become non-woman
People of sight call this very education death
The educational institution of women, if it remains unacquainted with religion
Such knowledge and skills are a death for passion and love

[157] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 129.
[158] See poem above: *ēk sawāl* (A Question).
[159] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 467.

Western education, in Iqbal's views here, is the death of communities. Iqbal, who had both religious and western education, looks unfavorably upon western education, at least when it is separated from religious education, and especially when it touches the women's world. He thinks that western culture has been the death of communities and that its death would be a gift for mankind. This poem has the resonance of commentary on European colonization of the rest of the world, and how western culture and values had muddied the colonized cultures. The greatest harm to native cultures seems to have come by the introduction of western education, because it challenges people's traditional views and also relegates their traditional values, knowledge, and education to an inferior status. In the notebook he kept in 1910, Iqbal comments on the purpose or "end of education," and says; "What is the law of things? Continual struggle. What must, then, be the end of education? Evidently, preparation for the struggle. A people working for intellectual superiority reveal thereby their feebleness."[160]

He also condemns western education as the culprit, which has the potential of deviating women from their feminine roles. Iqbal seems to be referring to the mischief he talked about in his earlier poem, which had been brought upon by the gender question and women's demand for equality.[161] Femininity, by this view, may be seen as one defined by the expectations upon women to be docile and domesticated, subservient to male authority, and putting the needs of their husbands and families before their own. It is unfeminine in Iqbal´s view for women to not desire motherhood, to be educated

[160] Iqbal, ed. *Stray Reflections*, 89.
[161] See poem above: *mard-e-farang* (Western Man).

equally as the men of their society, and to then seek economic independence by seeking equal access and rights in the workforce.

Iqbal's views on women's education and their primary responsibility are illumined when he writes:

> Considering, then the peculiar nature of our community, the teachings of Islam and the revelation of Physiology and Biology on the subject, it is clear that the Muslim woman should continue to occupy the position in society which Islam has allotted her. And the position which has been allotted to her must determine the nature of her education. I have tried to show above that the solidarity of our community rests on our hold on the religion and culture of Islam. The woman is the principal depository of the religious idea. In the interests of a continuous national life, therefore, it is extremely necessary to give her, in the first place, a sound religious education. That, however, must be supplemented by a general knowledge of Muslim History, Domestic Economy, and Hygiene. This will enable her to give a degree of intellectual companionship to her husband, and successfully to do the duties of motherhood which, in my opinion, is the principal function of a woman. All subjects which have a tendency to de-womanise and to de-muslimise her must be carefully excluded from her education. But our educationists are still groping in the dark. They have not yet been able to prescribe a definite course of study for our girls; and some of them are, unfortunately, too much dazzled by the glamour of western ideals to realise the difference between Islam which constructs nationality out of a purely abstract idea, i.e. religion, and westernism which builds nationality on an objective basis i.e. country.[162]

Iqbal's views are the same as those held by the earliest of reformers who promoted women's education, but only so that women may be better partners to their husbands, better mothers, be able to run the day-to-day operations of the household, and not fall prey to religious and cultural superstitions. However, Iqbal views some modern education as only supplemental to religious education, which he deems more pertinent for the

[162] Sherwani, *Speeches, Writings and Statements*, 134-35. From Iqbal's lecture "The Muslim Community – a Sociological Study" delivered at M.A.O. College, Aligarh, in the winter of 1910.

continuation of the Muslim community, and to preserve the honor and character of Muslim women.

As this poem suggests, Iqbal is primarily concerned with the preservation of Islamic culture and the continuation of the Muslim community. Religious education must be the foundation of women's schooling because only then can women understand their religious duty to be mothers. As mothers, only religious education can guide them in imparting Islamic teachings and morality to their children. Without the foundation of religious education, and with the influence of too much western education, women will stray from their religious, moral, and communal responsibility, which is the preservation and transmittance of Islamic culture and teachings. Hence, women's education must serve the purpose of instilling love and devotion to their religious and cultural identity; if it fails to do that then that education and knowledge gained by such education means the death of the community.

In the final poem in the section on women Iqbal once again argues what the role of woman in a society must be - motherhood. Though he still acknowledges the oppression of women, Iqbal once again takes a dismissive and ambivalent attitude towards the question of women's rights:

'aurat - Woman[163]

jauhar-e-mard 'ayāṅ hotā hai bē minnat-e-ġhēr
ġhēr kē hāth mēṅ hai jauhar-e-'aurat kī numūd
rāz hai us kē tap-e-ġham kā yahī nuktah-e-shauq
ātishīṅ lazzat-e-takhlīq sē hai us kā vujūd
ḳhultē jātē haiṅ isī āg sē isrār-e-ḥayāt
garam isī āg sē hai ma'rkah-e-būd-o-nabūd

[163] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 468.

maiṅ bhī maẕlūmī-e-nisvāṅ sē hūṅ ġhamnāk bohat
nahīṅ mumkin magar is ʻaqdah-e-mushkil kī kushūd

The virtue of the man manifests itself without the help of another
The virtue of woman is in the hand of the other
This very point is the secret of her burning sorrow
With the delight of creation her existence is brightly lit
And the secrets of life become manifest with this very fire
And this very fire keeps the battle between existence and non-existence heated
I too am sorrowful because of the oppression of women
However it is not possible to untie this difficult knot

Apart from his views about women that they have the religious duty of motherhood prescribed to them in Islam, it appears he also believes that a woman cannot be virtuous on her own. If a man's role is to have and display his valor, whether through day-to-day chivalry or through engaging in *jihad* for the cause of Islam, it will manifest on its own and is in the hands of the man. Perhaps Iqbal sees himself taking part in such a *jihad* by using his pen in service of Islam too. However, he believes that a woman's virtue is not in her own control but is in the hands of another. This "other" could be the community, the family, a father, or a husband, but one can safely assume that the hand that controls the woman's virtue is the power that patriarchy and its rules have over women.

A woman's burning sorrow is that she is not complete on her own. She needs a man in her life in order for her to fulfill her religious and moral obligation to the community, to fulfill her purpose, i.e. creating life. He suggests that a woman can only find true happiness in motherhood and her existence is lit by the delight of creation. It would seem that Iqbal is once more responding to the changes brought about in western society due to the women's liberation movement, where women demanded equality and

wanted the freedom to choose education and employment over matrimony and motherhood. If women choose to go the route of liberation and freedom of choice, which Iqbal believes is the result of modern education devoid of religious schooling, then existence itself is in danger. What he fails to acknowledge however is that freedom to choose one's own path also means that many women would still choose to be mothers, but it would be their own choice, and they would be able to limit the size of the family by even using contraception.

He does seem to view the condition of Womankind and states that he, like any other moral human being, is saddened by the centuries of oppression that women have had to endure. Having dismissed modern education and women's liberation movements in the West as anathema to natural order, he believes there is no way to solve the question of women's oppression, and washes his hands clean of the problem.

IV. Selected Poetry on *ḵhudī* and Muslim-ness:

In order to further contextualize and understand Iqbal's views on women one must look at what he espoused for Muslims and the greatness he believed Muslims were capable of. One of the prominent themes in Iqbal's poetry is that of *ḵhudī*, selfhood or ego.[164] *Ḵhudī* is the desired higher self that a person (Muslim) must strive to achieve. According to Hyder, Ali b. Abi Talib the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, in Iqbal's opinion, was the exemplar of *ḵhudī* and the "embodiment of three of the loftiest human

[164] Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 138.

characteristics: knowledge, love, and action" that constitute the *ḳhudī* .[165] Annemarie Schimmel explains that if we look for influences on Iqbals philosophy we would find it "…in Nietzche, whose tragical figure has occupied Iqbal's mind and his poetical imagination more intensely than any other Western philosopher." However, Schimmel further writes that "Iqbal himself has always maintained that the idea of the Perfect Man was Islamic, not Nietzschean."[166]

In the following poem Iqbal writes of the importance of *ḳhudī* and what the possibilities are for someone in whom *ḳhudī* is alive:

ḳhudī kī zindagī - The Life of *Ḳhudī*[167]

ḳhudī ho zindah to hai faqar bhī shehanshahī
nahīṅ hai sanjar-o-ṯaġhral sē kam shikwah-e-faqīr
ḳhudī ho zindah to kohsār par nayān-o-ḥarīr
nahang-e-zindah hai apnē muḥīṯ mēṅ āzad
nahang-e-murdah ko mauj-e-sarāb bhī zanjīr

If the self is alive the poverty is kingship
The might of a poor man is not less than that of *royalty*
If the self is alive then the boundless ocean is surmountable
If *ḳhudī* is alive then the rugged mountains are as smooth as silk
The living crocodile is liberated even within its confines
For a dead crocodile even the mirage of a wave is a chain

Ḳhudī makes enormous burdens easy to bear, it makes the most difficult tasks simple, and most of all, a person who reaches the state of *ḳhudī* will be the master of his (or her) own destiny. The demoralized state of the Muslim community required a call to action and Iqbal's solution to the Muslim malaise was *ḳhudī*. *Ḳhudī* drives people to

[165] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, 139.
[166] Schimmel, *Gariel's Wing: A Study Into The Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal,* 2nd ed. (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 1989), 323.
[167] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 452.

action; in fact Iqbal believes that action and life itself are the embodiment of *ḳhudī*. According to Iqbal, in order to strengthen one's selfhood and achieve the desired higher self one must: live a life of devotion to God and Muhammad, be devoted to a noble cause, be self-disciplined, and struggle against all odds; in fact facing hardships makes a person's *ḳhudī* strong.[168]

Iqbal comments on the slave mentality of Muslims after losing sovereignty and being colonized when he uses the metaphor of a crocodile in an enclosure. *Ḳhudī* transcends one's physical limitations and state of being; it is a mental and spiritual state where a person is free regardless of the circumstances. If Muslims were to be truly alive spiritually and mentally, they would be free even if they were colonized and subjects of foreign rulers. However, the state of Muslims is akin to death, and even a mirage seems to confine their collective spirit.

Like Muhammad who is considered by Muslims the final prophet sent by God to guide humankind, so was in Iqbal's view the Muslim community the final community, established by God to bring truth and justice to the world.[169] In the next poem Iqbal addresses the greatness that Muslims are heirs to, but have lost:

tan bah taqdīr - Resigned to fate[170]

isī Qur'an mēṅ hai ab tark-e-jahāṅ kī ta'līm
jis nē momin ko banāyā mah-o-parviṅ kā amīr
tan bah taqdīr hai āj un kē 'amal kā andāz
thī nihāṅ jin kē iradoṅ mēṅ ḳhudā kī taqdīr
thā jo naḳhūb, batadrīj wahī 'ḳhūb' hu'ā
keh ġhulāmī mēṅ badal jātā hai qaumoṅ kā ẓamīr

[168] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 33.
[169] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 45.
[170] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 402.

In this very Qur'an is the knowledge for leaving the world
Which had given the Muslim command over the moon and the stars
Their manner today is to forsake action and leave things to fate
That which was unpleasant, amazingly that very thing has come to pass
That servitude changes the conscience of nations

A Muslim should not be satisfied with less than greatness for both himself and his community. The Qur'an is the guiding force for Muslims which prepares them for the next life, and that is what their efforts should be towards. With the gift of the Qur'an God has bestowed such greatness over Muslims that their community can have command over the moon and the stars. Iqbal realizes that even though there is potential in Muslims they are as a community still affected by outside forces that have subjugated them. They have taken over the ways of the west.[171] That which they found unpleasant and inferior to their culture once has overpowered them and their senses. The actions of Muslims are no longer directed towards achieving the desired higher self and preparing for the next world, but instead they are concerned with material gains of this world. They have forsaken action and have left things to fate. Muslims would need to shake themselves out of the complacency and malaise they had fallen into due to steady loss of their lands and positions of power, and the prestige they had once held.

Muntasir Mir explains Iqbal's views and how he viewed *ḳhudī* as the prescription to remedy the decay of Muslim communities throughout the world and India. Islam and Muslim-ness are part of the major themes of Iqbal's poetry and philosophical thought. He blames the decadence of Muslim communities on Muslim leaders, Muslim masses, and

[171] Though the west is not explicitly mentioned in this poem it is a fair assumption that he is referring to the colonization of India by England being like servitude for Indians.

Muslim institutions. According to Mir, Iqbal is neither fond of the *mullahs* (religious scholars) nor does he look upon *Sufis* (spiritual ascetics) with favor. He believes both to have lost their true purpose and blames the *mullahs* for turning the mosque into their fiefs, and the *Sufis* for having strayed away from single-minded devotion to God and for being more interested in legends and stories.[172]

To Iqbal, both, Muslim philosophers and enlightened westernized Muslims, were also threats to the proper Islamic way. They both lacked the capacity for independent thought and accepted authority without question, and the westernized Muslims had become slaves to western secular thought.[173] Furthermore, the Muslim masses had no deep religious conviction left in them; their attachment to Islam was merely sentimental and not truly spiritual. Muslims had become divided and harbored ill will against each other.[174] The Muslim community of Iqbal's time was not the model community based on spirituality and egalitarianism, which the Prophet and his immediate successors had established.[175] Iqbal believed that if Muslims would follow the example of their predecessors (Muhammad and his companions), then they could reclaim their destiny of being the loftiest of God's creation. The following couplet in which Iqbal speaks in God's voice underscores this point:

kī Muhammad se vafā tūnē to ham tērē haiṅ

[172] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 42.
[173] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 43. Iqbal was especially critical of Turkey's post war secularism and believed that in becoming secular Turkey was playing into the hands of western powers.
[174] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 44.
[175] Mir, *Makers of Islamic*, 42.

yah jahaṅ cīz hai kyā, loḥ-o qalam tērē haiṅ[176]

We are yours if you are faithful Muhammad
This world is nothing the tablet and the pen belong to you

If we consider Iqbal's philosophy on *ḳhudī* and Muslim-ness we can see that he believes Muslims to be capable of amazing feats, and that he wants Muslims to not be limited in their imaginations of all that they can accomplish. He wants Muslims to break free of their subjugated mentality and urges them to overcome any obstacles that hinder their growth and advancement in their quest to achieve the higher desired self – a person with thriving *ḳhudī*.

Having considered his philosophy, one must wonder why Muslim-ness, which is capable of greatness and should not be subjugated, is not extended in the same way to women as it is to men? If Muslims have the potential for transcending their base existence, then women, at least Muslim women, should be capable of no less. If he urges Muslims to overcome obstacles and not back down from challenges, then Muslim women must challenge anything that suppresses and undermines their potential for growth. Contrasting his views on women with *ḳhudī* and Muslim-ness would suggest that when Iqbal thinks of Muslims and their greatness he imagines the Muslim man and not the Muslim woman, and in this way he may be denying Muslim women their Muslim-ness in some respect.

One point that is crucial at this juncture has to do with Iqbal's relationship with women whom he sees as exceptional. This especially emerges in his Persian poetry. I

[176] Muhammad Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 170. From the poem *javāb-e-shikvah* (pp. 151-170). This poem is penned as God's response to Iqbal's complaint (*shikvah*) to God, for allowing the Muslim community's greatness to wane, and for forsaking Muslims.

waited to raise this point so as to make sure that Iqbal's devotion to particular iconic women must not obscure his engagement with the ordinary women. The two women he is particularly fond of are the Prophet's daughter Fatima and the Babi poet Tahira. If Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law is the embodiment of *ḳhudī* then his companion is his wife Fatima. Hyder elaborates on Iqbal's devotion to Fatima:

> Had the Prophet not forbidden grave worship, Iqbal declares in his praise for Fatima, 'I would have circumambulated her grave and fallen into prostration on her dust.' Fatima is not only the center of the realm of love but she is also the leader of all those in the caravan of God's love…And Fatima is not only the perfection of all mothers, but all women; for in addition to her love for her children and husband, she is tied to the toil and labor of this world, having borne a heavy burden in the most excruciating circumstances. Along with action and love, knowledge is also the providence of Fatima. The Word of God rests on her lips as she works her way through life.[177]

It is clear from his Persian poetry that Fatimah brings out passionate devotion in Iqbal; however, she hardly figures in his Urdu poetry that concerns women. One has to wonder if Iqbal wrote his Persian poetry with the objective of attracting Iranians, most of whom are Shi'i and many of whom hold Fatima in the highest esteem. Apart from Fatima, we also encounter Tahirah Qurat ul Ain—most noticeably in Iqbal's heavenly journey, the *Jāvīdnāmah.* Iqbal locates her with the prominent Sufi from Baghdad, Mansur al-Hallaj, and the last Mughal court poet of Delhi, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib. Hyder clarifies what Tahira means to her devotees:

> Held up against the Muslim religious order and the Qājār rulers, Tahira bears the dual identity of a poet and a rebel with seductive expressions…..The sharp political edge that Tahira's poetry bore, along with her intervention in the patriarchal order, suggest that the old way of the planets, whether disciplinary or

[177] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, 139.

imaginative, gendered or sexualized, must recede into the spheres of history.[178]

The reason that Iqbal would want to celebrate this Babi poet's legacy in his heavenly journey remains a mystery. And why this woman, as does the Prophet's daughter, makes such a prominent appearance in Persian and not in Urdu is also unclear. Could it be that reforming the Muslim women of India, those who read Urdu more fluently than they read Persian, was Iqbal's priority and not the women of Iran? Is it possible that due to the existence of colonialism in India Iqbal felt a more urgent need to address women especially on issues related to veiling, education, and responsibility? If Iqbal consciously coveted a warm reception in Iran, he received it. As Hyder points out, some of the most prominent thinkers and reformers of modern Iran, the likes of Ali Shariati and Abdol Karim Saroush, drew extensively from Iqbal, especially ideas concerning the raising of the self (*ḵhudī*).[179] Since Iqbal's Persian poetry does not form a central core of my current work, I will not delve into these matters here.

Conclusion

Writing about Iqbal is a formidable challenge. He had many agendas and many more target audiences. He was fully aware that the interpretation of texts changes with time and that his own texts might carry meanings for the next generation that they did not carry for his own. In fact, his very approach to the Qur'an, as Hyder points out, is "dynamic, existential." He quoted a Sufi master in this regard: "As in the words of a Sufi—'no understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the

[178] Syed Akbar Hyder, *Jupiter, Just a Step Away.* Paper delivered at Tufts University, September 27, 2014.
[179] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, 158.

believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet."[180] It is also important to point out here that throughout his career, the one community that Iqbal does not have faith in, as far as the transmission of the Qur'an and guidance for the community were concerned, is that of the traditional religious scholars, the mullahs. And this lack of faith most importantly unites Iqbal with the next four writers that I study in this work.

It is in Iqbal's spirit, then, that I would also like to offer a critique of Iqbal through the mediation of works like those of Amina Wadud. She is a woman who argues that women in Islam are co-equals of men and values given to characteristics of gender are culturally constructed. Focusing on the language of the Qur'an, Wadud establishes that man and woman are simply two categories of the human species and have been endowed with the same potential.[181] That Allah breathed his own spirit (*nafkhat al-ruh*, or Spirit of Allah) into both the male and female human.[182] And man and woman are two congruent parts meant to fit together and complete one another.[183]

Although Iqbal puts much emphasis on a woman's responsibility to birth and raise children, Wadud points out that the Qur'an does not mention child rearing as an essential created function of a woman, which is a psychological and a cultural perception of mothering, and not a biological function.[184] Furthermore, the Qur'an does not treat male and female individuals differently with regard to their relationship with Allah; the only thing that matters in that relationship is the *taqwa* (piety) of the individual, and gender

[180] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala,* p. 149.
[181] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 15.
[182] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 16.
[183] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 21.
[184] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 22.

has no significance.[185] Any interpretations of the Qur'an that makes a woman out to be less equal than a man, and therefore less human, are problematic. Interpretations that deny the equality of women with regard to personal aspirations are "restrictions placed on the woman's right to pursue personal happiness within the context of Islam."[186]

It is not necessarily Islam or the Qur'an that is guiding Iqbal's views on women, but rather they are a reflection of the cultural influences on Iqbal. However, conventional his views may be, the fact that Iqbal takes up the dialogue on women's issues in his poetry is not insignificant. Later poets will join this dialogue and offer more progressive views on women's issues as the nationalist movement in India moves forward, and other cultural and literary events influence their outlook on the role of women in society. In the next chapter I look at the poetry of Akhtar Shirani who is the first to bring women into poetry as subjects of romance without the ambiguous use of gender-neutral verbal inflections, and also one of the first poets to offer an image of a woman as a whole and independent person.

[185] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 34-36.
[186] Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 35.
- Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 40-42. Wadud also gives the example of Bilqis (Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon's court) mentioned in the Qur'an as an example of a strong woman who was the leader of a nation and could perform tasks generally considered masculine in many cultures. She was able to be both worldly and pious at the same time.

Chapter Three: Akhtar Shirani

bah rabb-e ka'ba us ki yād mēṅ 'umrēṅ gaṅvā dūṅgā
maiṅ us vādī kē zarrē zarrē par sajdah bichā dūṅgā
jahāṅ voh jān-e ka'ba 'azmat-e butkhānā rahtī thī
yahī vādi hai voh hamdam jahān Reḥānah rahtī thī[187]

I swear by the Lord of the Ka'ba, I will squander my life in her memory
I will spread my prostrations on every single atom of that valley—
Where the life of the Ka'ba, the glory of the temple lived
This is that very valley where Rehana lived

Akhtar Shirani

For Urdu, the 1930s were roaring—romance and progress without apologies. The above verses of Akhtar Shirani echoed throughout South Asia as though all beloveds bore the name of "Rehana." In many other poems, he also names his beloved "Salma." And even though the traditional literary historians slighted him, the masses sang his verses with passion. Some compared him to Lord Byron. They both died young.

Akhtar Shirani grew up in India during a time characterized by a growth of nationalist sentiment. Like other contemporary poets, Shirani was influenced by the events that were shaping the thinking of young people coming of age in the early twentieth century, such as the Progressive Writers' Movement. Like others, Shirani used his poetry to bring social ills into the limelight.[188] Shirani was the first canonical modern Urdu poet to refer to his earthly beloveds by their feminine names, Salma and Rehana.

[187] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, ed. Younas Hasni, (Lahore: Nadeem Book House, 1993), 212.
[188] Some of his poetry even shows his regard for the communist struggle in Russia; for instance his poem titled *māṅ* (Mother) is based on Maxim Gorky's 1906 novel of the same name which discusses the revolutionary struggle of factory workers.

Ishrat Afreen explains that this was no ordinary step in Urdu poetry. Women's identities in that culture and at that time were tied to the father or the husband and were not generally referred to by their names.[189] Of course the rich *maśnavī* and *marśiyah* genres had existed in Perso-Urdu for many centuries; however, the characters who populated these landscapes were not usually ordinary. For instance, Mir Hasan's (1736-1786) towering *maśnavi*, *Saḥr ul bayān* (The Magic of Discourse) relays a lovely interspecies romance between Prince Benazir and the Fairy Badr-e Munir. The great Urdu scholar Ralph Russell considers the *maśnavī* tradition a unit of the "Arabian Nights Class of Literature":

> The poet does not place his story in a settling drawn from the real world which he sees around him, or from that of an earlier historical period; the world he portrays is largely an idealized world, in which the aspirations of the poet and his audience are shown as being realized, and in which men live happily in a community where true love ultimately triumphs over all difficulties.[190]

Within this reading of the *maśnavī* tradition, the genre appears to be a counterbalance to the *ghazal* one. And a genre linked to the *ghazal* and the *maśnavī* was the *marśiyah*. Through the *marśiyah* we heard about the seventh-century Battle of Karbala waged by the Umayyad authorities against the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Hussain. Women do appear in these *marśiyahs* but Hyder wonders what precise ends they serve:

> Although many Shias depict Zainab and Fatima as models of female empowerment in the early history of Islam, at times these depictions are constituted with tensions and ambiguities. On the one hand, these women offer powerfully provocative models of courage to the community; on the other hand, these women are so perfect that they lose their humanness and appear as Prophet-like and Imam-like. Can the invocation of these models atone for the injustices done to women?....When these women are discussed in Shii gatherings, their

[189] Ishrat Afreen, Personal Communication, February 18, 2015.
[190] Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russell, *Three Mughal Poets* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 92.

> power derives from their status as Prophet's daughter and granddaughter—Fatima, at times, is even raised above the Virgin Mary, making it impossible for her life to resonate and cohere with the lives of her common devotees.[191]

Turning to the more mundane *ghazal* world, the traditional beloved of this genre is a male, referred to by using masculine, or neutral gender verbal inflections, Shirani broke with tradition and brought the woman into Urdu poetry as beloved. For the first time a woman could be seen as being on equal footing in the matter of love and romance. Albeit fictional, she was now a complete character, with her own story and place in Urdu poetry. Nadia Uttam explains that while Hali (1837-1914) was among the first Urdu poets to write about the plight of women in India, it was Akhtar Shirani who wrote openly about women's sexuality, and women as the subjects of love and desire.[192] By writing about Woman as the axis of love, he tried to change the triteness of old traditions and norms of poetic love. As the following verses show, for Shirani the beloved was not only someone who received attention and affection but performed acts of love and desire herself:

> *Voh is tīlē par aksar 'āshiqanah gīt gātī thī![193]*
> *Purānē sūrmāoṅ kē fasānē gunganātī thī!*
> *Yahīṅ par, muntażir mērī voh bē tābānah rehtī thī*
> *Yahī vādī hai voh hamdam' jahāṅ Rehana rehtī thī!*

Upon this hill she frequently sang songs of love
She used to hum the tales of old braves
Right here, she used to anxiously await me
This is that very valley where Rehana lived

[191] Hyder, *Reliving Karbala,* 100-101.
[192] Nadia Uttam, *Urdu Shā'irī Mēṅ Aurat Kā Taṣavur*, (Lucknow: Al-Khatat publishers, 1991), 167.
[193] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 212.

I. Historical Context

As discussed in Chapter One, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many Muslim leaders in India were trying to address what they saw as the poor state of Indian Muslims. Iqbal looked back at examples from early Islamic history when he tried to raise the consciousness of Indian Muslims, and reminded them of their gloried past. Leaders associated with the *Khilāfat* Movement were also causing many Indian Muslims to re-imagine their identity, trying to form a united Muslim community for political purposes. The India that Akhtar Shirani was born into, in 1905, was one in which Hindus and Muslims alike were trying to reform their communities. As Barbara Metcalf explains:

> The reformist concern with women's-and men's-lives was a response to far-reaching changes in late nineteenth-century India. In examining the stimulus for reform movements in modern India, historians have focused on the changes engendered by the colonial context: the end of Muslim political dominance; an idiom of British rule that encouraged religious identity; the social dislocation caused by changing requirements for participation in governmental and economic roles; the presence of an aggressive alternative range of cultural values; and the growth of cities and the enlarged scale of social and economic activities.[194]

Many leaders used religious identity as the basis for reform. Iqbal focused his ideology of reform upon men but there were those who were using religion as the basis for reforming women's lives too. To this end, of reforming Muslim women, one text that stands "at the heart of significant sociopolitical change" is *Bihishti Zewar*, written in the early 1900s by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, leader of the Deobandi reform

[194] Barbara D. Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar. A Partial Translation with Commentary*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 4.

movement.[195] Maulana Thanawi wrote *Bihishti Zewar* in order to instruct respectable Muslim women in how to become good Muslims. This text became so central to cultural transformation in the early twentieth-century that "it became a classic gift for Muslim brides," and women would go to their husband's home with the "Qur'an in one hand and the *Bihishti Zewar* in the other."[196]

Much like Iqbal, Thanawi believed that Muslims had strayed from the righteous path and the teachings of Islam, and that is why Muslims were in trouble. "Their lives had become vapid, offensive, consumed with concern for worldly goods and a good reputation, plagued by frustrated social relationships."[197] The basic premise on which Thanawi's reform agenda was based was that men and women were generally possessed with the same qualities and faculties, and hence were responsible for how they conducted themselves.[198] Thanawi believed that all Muslims, regardless of their gender needed to be instructed in how to develop good characteristics and be good Muslims in the service of God. In his view both men and women were capable of perfecting themselves and acquiring moral discipline.[199] However, each man or woman had to contend with "the struggle between intelligence or sense, '*aql*," and also "the undisciplined impulses of the lower soul, *nafs*." And Thanawi believed that women were more susceptible to the negative influences of *nafs* - the lower soul.[200] Hence, women needed to be educated and instructed in proper conduct and taught how to be better Muslims.

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[195] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 5.
[196] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 3.
[197] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 16.
[198] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 8.
[199] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 15.
[200] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 8.

As a religious reformist, Thanawi objected to the customs that denied women the rights guaranteed to them in Islam. Although widows are permitted to remarry according to Islamic teachings, the customary practices in India often denied them remarriage. Custom also denied women their right to inheritance and marriage portion (*mahr*), also guaranteed under Islamic law. He believed that early Islam meant to strengthen women's place in society by giving them legal protections and economic rights and that his reforms were meant to emulate those early days of Islam, and raise the status of women in society. Thanawi, however, did not agree with modernists and believed that his reforms alone would give women their authentic rights.[201]

Although Maulana Thanawi was a reformer and supported women's education, he still believed in a hierarchical society, one in which women were subservient to men.[202] Despite Thanawi's support for women's education in order to reform Muslim society in the private sphere, he was not completely devoid of patriarchal style thinking. He was concerned that once women become literate they may read morally questionable things in novels.[203] His concern is no doubt compounded by his belief that women were more susceptible to things that lead them astray from morality and good behavior, since women were more affected by the lower soul. Barbara Metcalf explains that Thanawi was concerned about the weak will of women and that, "the anxiety over women's behavior suggests that women are seen as an extension of men: in women, men see the lack of control they most fear in themselves."[204]

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[201] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 24.
[202] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 10.
[203] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 14.
[204] Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 14.

Urdu print media played an important part in the hands of those that wished to reform women's lives and address women's issues. Christina Oesterheld explains that, "Urdu acquired a special relation to women in the late nineteenth-century when ideas of reform of Muslim social life were propagated through Urdu treatises and, most prominently, novels on women's education and on the exemplary conduct of Muslim girls and women."[205] Urdu writers began to write about women's issues and engaged topics like girl's education, *pardah*, polygamy, divorce rights, and household finances.[206] Men ran the earliest Urdu periodicals aimed at circulating debates over gender issues, and their wives generally did not have a prominent role in publishing these periodicals.[207] However, Mumtaz Ali and his wife Muhammadi Begum started *Tahzib un-Niswan* in Lahore in 1898, and they made sure that women knew that *she* was in charge, while he was only the financial manager. They did this so more women would be encouraged to contribute to the journal. Muhammadi Begum was the exemplar of a woman who could fulfill the role of a wife, mother, companion, and be educated and pious, all the while working with her husband.[208] As women became more and more involved in contributing to these journals they were able to voice their concerns on a range of issues that many segments of society felt needed to be changed.

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[205] Christina Oesterheld, "Islam in Contemporary South Asia: Urdu and Muslim Women," *Oriente Moderno* 23, no. 84 (2004): 217.
[206] Oesterheld, "Islam in Contemporary South Asia," 217.
[207] Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 107-08. *Akhbar un-Nissa* was founded in Delhi in 1887 by Sayyid Ahmad Dehlavi and *Mu'allim-i-Niswan* was established in the late 1880s in Hyderabad by Maulvi Muhibb-i-Husain.
[208] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 113.

The trend towards more liberty and modernization for women continued and by 1918 the *Anjuman-i-Khavatin-i-Islam* (All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference), passed a resolution against polygamy. Its argument was that the letter of the Qur'an may allow polygamy but the spirit of the Qur'an goes against it, since no man can possibly treat multiple wives equally.[209] Furthermore, women were also championing the end of veiling by arguing that although coming out of *pardah* would allow women more freedom it would also make the lives of men much easier, by taking away the burden of escorting women everywhere and always being responsible for their safety and mobility.

II. Biographical Information

Mohammad Dowd Khan Akhtar Shirani was born at the turn of twentieth century in 1905, in an Indian town called Tonk.[210] He was born into an educated family and was introduced to high literature and poetry at an early age. His father, Professor Mahmood Khan Shirani, was an educated and cultured man who had lived in London for several years but provided his son the obligatory religious education common in most Indian Muslim families. After learning the Qur'an in childhood Shirani received his early education in Persian while he still lived at home.[211] He began developing his skill in

[209] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 290.
[210] Aziz Vasti, "Muqadamah," In *Kulliyat-e-Akhtar Shirani*, edited by Younas Hasni, (Lahore: Nadeem Book House, 1993), 713. Shirani's birth name was Muhammad Dowd Khan. He took on the nom de plume of Akhtar. Shirani was the name of the Afghan clan that his family belonged to.
[211] Vasti, "Muqadamah," 713.

poetry under the guidance of his master Muhammad Sabir Shakir and started composing poetry around the age of eleven or twelve.[212]

In 1921 Shirani moved to Lahore where he started attending Oriental College. It was during this time that he began to be regarded as a poet of romance. After graduating from Oriental College in 1922, Shirani started giving full attention to composing poetry and took on Allama Tajvar Najibabadi as his poet master.[213] Along with composing poetry Shirani worked as an editor for several magazines, which included, *Humāyūṅ*, *Intiḳhāb*, *Khayālistān* (which he himself started in 1928), and finally he served as the editor of *Shāhkār*.[214]

Accompanying his father, who had been teaching at the Oriental College in Lahore, Shirani moved back to Tonk in 1940, where he remained for eight years. In 1948 Shirani moved back to Lahore, but fell ill soon after arriving, due to heavy consumption of alcohol, and died on September 9, 1948.[215] He was survived by his wife, two sons, and one daughter.[216]

As is evident from his poetry, Shirani's love for a woman named Salma had a profound influence in his life and his disposition for love and romance. Her very existence is rife with debate, but in a world where the author's art is read as though it were an autobiography, and the author's muses are taken for their real-life romantic attention, Salma existed as a real person in the minds of Shirani's admirers.

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[212] Younas Hasni, "*Akhtar Shirani: Ahvāl-o-Āsār."* In *Kulliyat-e-Akhtar Shirani*, edited by Younas Hasni, (Lahore: Nadeem Book House, 1993), 11.
[213] Vasti, "Muqadamah," 714.
[214] Vasti, "Muqadamah," 714.
[215] Hasni, "*Akhtar Shirani: Ahvāl-o-Āsār,"* 12.
[216] Vasti, "Muqadamah," 715.

Aziz Vasti is one of those people who claim that Salma was a real person. According to Vasti, Akhtar Shirani became acquainted with Salma while he was in Lahore. However, this love was unrequited and Salma remained out of his reach. Although, after being unsuccessful in love with Salma, Shirani did have several other love interests.[217] Others like S. Akhtar Jafri have a completely different opinion when it comes to the subject of Salma. Jafri explains the idea of Salma by looking at a long-standing tradition in Arabic poetry. He explains that when Arab poets used to compose love poems about their beloved they never used the beloved's real name, but instead used a pseudonym. Jafri claims that Shirani was influenced by this tradition, and there was no actual person for whom he used the pseudonym of Salma. Salma, to Shirani, represented the ideal type of the beloved. The only reason why people think Salma was a real person is because Shirani has portrayed her in such a realistic way, and with such emotion, that readers feel he surely had a real connection with Salma, or some woman that the name represented.[218]

Many people who have written about Akhtar Shirani have simply used the numerous poems of Shirani to spin tales about either being witness to, or having heard of actual events that place Shirani and Salma together.[219] Jafri cites a Dr. Mausuf, who knew Akhtar Shirani for twenty years, saying that he had never known of a real Salma being in

[217] Hasni, "*Akhtar Shirani: Ahvāl-o-Āsār,"* 11.
- N.M. Rashid, "*Cand Lamhē Akhtar Shirani Kē Sāth*." In *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, edited by Younas Hasni, (Lahore: Nadeem Book House, 1993), 162. Rashid claims that Salma was nothing more than a romantic ideal and not someone with whome Shirani had a relationship.
[218] Syed Akhtar Jafri, *Akhtar Shirani Aur Us Kī Shā'irī*, (Lahore, Pakistan: Ainah-e-Adab, 1964), 39.
[219] Jafri, *Akhtar Shirani Aur Us Kī Shā'irī*, 40.

Shirani's life.[220] Even though sources on whether Salma was a real person and someone Shirani had a relationship with contradict each other, it cannot be denied that his idea of the ideal type of romance influenced his poetry to such an extent that he became famous for being the poet of romance. It is worth mentioning here that apart from Salma, Shirani sings of a "Rehana," and she also remains a mystery. To me, both these women stand for a beloved who is iconic—whether they existed or not in flesh has little bearing upon the way I read Shirani.

III. Selected Poetry

'aurat – Woman[221]

ḥayāt-o-ḥurmat-o-mehr-o-vafā kī shān hai 'aurat!
shabāb-o-ḥusn-o-andāz-o-adā kī jān hai 'aurat!

ḥijāb-o-'ismat-o-sharm-o-ḥayā kī kān hai 'aurat!
jo dēkho ġhaur sē har mard kā īmān hai 'aurat!

agar 'aurat nah ātī kul jahāṅ mātam kadah hotā!
agar 'aurat nah hotī har makāṅ ġham kadah hotā!

jahāṅ mēṅ ēk saccē mard kī taqdīr hai 'aurat!
ṭilism-e-'ālam-e-bālā kī ik aksīr hai 'aurat!

yad-e-qudrat mēṅ ik caltī huī shamshīr hai 'aurat!
zamīṅ par fiṭrat-e-m'asūm kī taṣvīr hai 'aurat!
jahān mēṅ kartī hai shahī magar lashkar nahīṅ rakhtī!
diloṅ ko kartī hai zaḳhmī magar ḳhanjar nahīṅ rakhtī!

kahīṅ m'aṣūm ṭiflī is kē naġhmoṅ sē behaltī hai!
kahīṅ bēḳhud jawānī us kē nosh-e-lab sē phaltī hai!

[220] Jafri, *Akhtar Shirani Aur Us Kī Shā'irī*, 42.
[221] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 1015-16.

kahīṅ majbūr pīrī us kī bātoṅ sē saṁbhaltī hai!
kahīṅ ārām sē jān us kē qadmoṅ par nikaltī hai!

nahīṅ hai kabriyā lēkin shān kabryā'ī hai!
hamārī sārī piyārī 'umr par us kī khudā'ī hai!

usī kī bū hai duniyā kē lehektē ġhuncahzāroṅ mēṅ!
usī kā rang gulshan kī mehektī nau bahāroṅ mēṅ!

usī kē naġhmē jannat kē macaltē ābshāroṅ mēṅ!
usī kā nūr qudrat kē bahārīṅ jalvahzāroṅ mēṅ!

bahār āfrīṅsh hai! shabāb zindigānī hai!
javāṅ fiṭrat kā ik ḳhoyā huā khavāb javānī hai!

voh rotī hai to sārī kā'ināt āṅsū bahātī hai!
voh haṅstī hai to fiṯrat bēḳhudī sē muskarātī hai!

voh sotī hai to sātoṅ āsmāṅ ko nīṅd ātī hai!
voh uṭhtī hai to kul khavābīdah duniyā ko uṭhātī hai!

vahī armān-e-hastī hai! wahī īmān-e-hastī hai!
badan kehiyē agar hastī ko to voh jān-e-hastī hai!

voh cāhē to ulaṭ dē pardah-e-duniyā-e-fānī ko!
woh cāhē to miṭā dē josh-e-beḥr-e-zindigānī ko!

voh cāhē to jalā dē naḳhalzār ḥukmarānī ko!
woh cāhē to badal dē rang-e-bazm-e-āsmānī ko!

voh kehdē to bahār-e-jalvah miṭ jā'ē naẕāroṅ sē
voh kehdē to libās-e-nūr chin jā'ē sitāroṅ sē!

Pride of existence and honor, affection and fidelity, is woman!
Force of youth and beauty, style and grace, is woman!

Mine of modesty and chastity, honor and shame, is woman!
If you look carefully each man's faith is woman!

If woman didn't exist the world would be a place of mourning
If woman didn't exist each house would be a place of sorrow

An honest man that is in the world, his fortune is woman!
She is the dynamic force that lends meaning to a chaotic world

A waving sword in the hand of nature is woman!
A portrait of innocent disposition on this earth is woman!

She rules the world but does not possess an army!
She wounds hearts but does not possess a dagger!

Sometimes innocence of childhood is cajoled by her songs!
The dynamic youth is sustained by the nectar of her lips

Sometimes compelled old age is steadied by her words!
Sometimes at her feet the life leaves with ease!

She is not majesty, but she has aura of majesty
She has power over our entire existence

It's her fragrance that graces the rose gardens
Her color alone is in the fragrant springtime of the garden!

Her songs alone are in the gushing waterfalls of heaven!

It is her light that emits from nature's abundant epiphanies

She is the creator of spring! She is the youth of life!
She is a lost dream of a young nature!

When she cries the whole creation sheds tears!
When she laughs, nature laughs uncontrollably!

When she sleeps, the seven heavens feel sleepy!
When she awakes she wakes up the whole dreaming world!

She is the desire of life! She is the faith of the world!
If you call existence a body, she is the life force!

If she desires she can turnover the veil of the fleeting world!
If she desires she can wipe away the fervor of life's ocean!

If she so wishes she may burn down the expanse of (he who wields) authority
If she so wishes she may change the hues of the sky

If she says so the splendor of the spring will be wiped away from sight!
If she says so the dress of light can be taken away from the stars!

Although Shirani champions issues that affect women in several of his poems, in this poem he shares his views on the nature of woman and her place in this world. His views are progressive for Urdu poetry in the way that he takes on the subject of Woman and represents women without the ambiguity of using the neutral gender. His views in this poem are somewhat complicated and do not follow a single stream of thought. The way he represents the subject of the woman is primarily idealized and romanticized. This can be seen easily in this poem because he places woman on a high pedestal, above creation, instead of equal to man. However, some of his representation also hints at how his views are influenced by traditional and nationalist views of the woman's body in India, especially when he proclaims women to be associated with modesty, honor, shame, and chastity. In fact, the opening verse is what puts woman as not just the pride of existence, but also of honor and fidelity. In this way he locates traditional virtues within the female body. He identifies the woman as the symbol of chastity and modesty. Such representations are clearly in line with the traditional and conservative view of women in not only Islam, but also in India in general, especially during the nationalist era.[222]

He establishes her importance by claiming that if it were not for her the whole of creation would be a place of mourning. That all good things come from the existence of the woman is evident from several verses in this poem. In one of the verses he alludes to

[222] Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* (1993). Colonized Indians accepted their inferiority to the West in material aspects but claimed superiority in the spiritual (inner) domain. Women became the representatives of this inner domain, which was pure and stood in opposition to the profane outer domain. This inner domain became the place where the colonized protected their identity (pp. 119-21). For the purposes of nationalist agenda the woman represented goddess or mother. She was the possessor of "spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity…[this] image of woman as goddess or mother served to erase her sexuality in the world outside the home (pp. 130-31)."

the strength of the woman when he compares her to the waving sword of nature. Describing the woman as a waving sword is an interesting choice by Shirani because the strength of the sword is generally associated with the male figure, especially because of the phallic imagery that is created by such a choice of words. This line can be used as an example where the poet is actually comparing the woman as an equal of man, rather than describing her in a fanciful way, putting her above nature and creation.

In other verses Shirani describes the woman as one who rules the world without the use of an armed force, and how she wounds hearts though she does not keep a dagger. Although the meaning of these verses is apparent at face value it is difficult to establish the thought process behind these words. For example, is he simply alluding to woman's sheer power over this world, or is he suggesting that a woman is manipulative, who can control the world by having power over those who have dominion over *it*? He may also be suggesting that her influence is so great that it is like ruling the world without the use of force, which is the way of men. A woman is more enlightened and can affect the world without the use of violence.

In the very next verse he says that she wounds hearts, though she does not keep a dagger. This line problematizes the non-violent and non-manipulative nature of the woman. This verse is quite telling of his romantic disposition, and that he may have some residual bitterness due to having lost in love. As mentioned above, his views regarding the nature of Woman and her influence on, and place in the world, are somewhat complicated, and not at all easy to discern.

In other verses Shirani says that if she is asleep the seven heavens feel sleepy, but when she awakes she has the power to wake up the whole world. These lines do have a significant feminist undertone that recognizes the importance of woman's role in the world. If the woman is kept in darkness, ignorant and uneducated, it is the same as keeping all of creation asleep and in darkness. However, if the woman is educated and empowered her contributions are such that the whole world becomes awake and alive.

After these verses the poem once again takes a turn towards exaggerated idealization and the rest of the poem describes the woman as having full dominion over the world, with power over life and death. She is the life force that drives existence, and she has the power, if she so desires, to take all the beauty and life from the world. The various perspectives with which Shirani views the subject of woman are the most interesting aspect of the poem. Which of these is his personal view is difficult to tell, but the fact that he challenges the notion that the Woman is the weaker gender is a break from tradition in many ways.

'aurat (fanun-e-laṯifah kī duniyā mēṅ) – Woman (In the world of fine arts)[223]

kahīṅ voh sh'ēr kē pardē mēṅ chup kar muskarātī hai

muṣṣavir kī nazar mēṅ us kī taṣvīrēṅ parēshāṅ haiṅ
adab kī meḥfiloṅ mēṅ us kī tanvīrēṅ parēshāṅ haiṅ

muġhannī kī ṣadā mēṅ naġhmah ban kar jhulmalātī hai
niqāb sāz mēṅ āhaṅg ho kar thartharātī hai

naqūsh-e-āb-o-gul mēṅ us kī taṣvīrēṅ parēshāṅ haiṅ
ṣanam sāzoṅ kē dil mēṅ us kī tafsīrēṅ parēshāṅ haiṅ

ḥarīm rang-o-bū mēṅ nashah ban kar lehlahātī hai

[223] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 292-93.

har ik taṣvīr kē rangoṅ mēṅ nakhat us kī āvārah

ḥasīṅ aur ḳhushnumā ash'ār shādāb us kē naġhmoṅ sē
hamārē barbaṯoṅ kē tarē bēḳhavāb us kē naġhmoṅ sē

butoṅ kē marmarīṅ pardoṅ mēṅ rangat us kī āvārah

ġharẓ jab tak yah duniyā aur us kī ḳhushnamā'ī hai
hamārī zindagī par ṣirf 'aurat kī ḳhudā'ī hai

Sometimes she smiles hiding in the veil of a couplet

Her portraits are dispersed in the vision of the painter
Her refulgence is dispersed in gatherings of literature

Becoming a song in the singers voice she sways
Becoming a harmony in the veil of an instrument she vibrates

Her images are scattered in the impressions of water and flower
Her exegeses are dispersed in the hearts of idol makers

Within the sacred realm of color and fragrance she spreads herself out in the form of intoxication

In the colors of each picture her fragrance wanders

Beautiful and splendid verses are verdant by her songs
The strings of our harps are restless with her songs

Her hue wanders in the marble veils of statues

In short, as long as this world and her beauty remain
Only her divinity will be upon us

Akhtar Shirani celebrates woman and all the various ways, in which the form, beauty, and subject of woman, has adorned the various forms of arts. In the first verse Shirani is perhaps referring to a *ghazal* couplet, in which she hides. She has been *there* for centuries, but the gender-neutral language of the genre has masked her presence. Traditionally, the *ghazal* genre uses the gender-neutral verbal inflections, masking the

gender of the beloved. The first verse of this poem can be read as an unveiling of a *ghazal* couplet, in order to show that this beloved is indeed a woman. She has been hiding there for centuries due to the traditions and conventions of the genre that denied her a visible place. Through this one verse, and this poem, Shirani shows that Woman is present and celebrated in all forms of arts. Why should the *ghazal,* one of the most beloved artistic expressions in Urdu, mask her presence and veil her with the use of a neutral gender?

He proceeds to list all the ways the woman's presence in various media enriches them. She sways becoming a song in the singer's voice; she is the harmony of an instrument's string. Her presence is like a fragrance in pictures; marble statues are made beautiful by her hue. Her beauty is like the presence of the divine in whatever it becomes a part of, and it is here to last as long the world remains. Shirani wishes to celebrate Woman and her beauty and opposes the veils that hide her, both figurative and literal, which is the topic of the next poem:

'aurat aur purdah - Woman and the veil[224]

pardah-e-barg-e-gul-e-tar mēṅ hai nighat pinhāṅ
dil-e-insāṅ mēṅ hai jażb-e-muhabbat pinhāṅ

ẕulmat-e-beḥar mēṅ hai gauhar-e-raṅgīn mastūr
pardah-e-qabr mēṅ hai cashmah-e-shīrīṅ mastūr

ḥusn-e-fiṯrat hai gulistāṅ kī bahāroṅ mēṅ nihāṅ
naġhmah-e-rūḥ-fizā sāz kē tāroṅ mēṅ nihāṅ

l'al pinhāṅ hai agar kān kē ganjīnē mēṅ
barq-e-rakhshāṅ hai nihāṅ abar kē ā'īnē mēṅ

[224] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 1002.

jab har ik ṯarfah laṯafat hai nihāṅ pardē mēṅ
phir burā kyā hai jo ‘aurat hai nihāṅ pardē mēṅ

Fragrance is hidden in the veil of a fresh flower’s petal
Passion for love is hidden in the heart of man

Colorful gem is concealed in the darkness of the ocean
In the veil of the grave is concealed the sweet spring

The beauty of nature is hidden in flowering of the garden
The exhilarating song is hidden in the strings of the instrument

If the ruby is concealed in the mine’s treasure
Dazzling lightning is concealed in the cloud’s mirror

When elegance is hidden in a veil all around
Then why is it wrong if woman is hidden in the veil?

In this poem Shirani takes on the age-old tradition of *pardah* and compares it to other marvels of nature that are also hidden or veiled in one way or another. In the end he asks if all these marvels are hidden then why is it wrong if a woman is veiled? He addresses the issue in a way that appears to be supportive of veiling, it may even seem that he only regards women as objects of pleasure, since he is comparing them to wondrous natural phenomena that people find pleasing or beautiful. A more careful reading however may reveal a deeper meaning. He is in fact showing the absurdity of the practice by using the examples of all these natural wonders that are concealed. The answer to his question can only be that if these natural wonders remain hidden they will never be appreciated, and for all intents and purposes would be non-existent.

Fragrance is indeed hidden in the petal of a flower till it blooms, and love and passion reside in the hearts of people till evoked. A pearl is concealed in its shell in the darkness of the ocean, and a song remains hidden in the instrument’s string till the strings

are plucked. A ruby stays buried in the mine till the rock encasement is hammered and chipped away, and lightning is veiled in the cloud till a change takes place that gives it its forceful freedom. Similarly, women who are subjected to observe *purdah* cannot achieve self-actualization. It takes a change of status quo, and sometimes it may even require forceful action in order to achieve the desired change and outcome.

All these things are known for their marvel, their splendor, and their beauty, because they have shed their veil. The veil becomes this oppressive instrument that prevents women from becoming all that they are capable of. If we focus on just the aspects of love and romance, then perhaps the veil also keeps the woman hidden from the sight of those that may desire her. And by the same token, it keeps her away from experiencing love on equal and mutual terms.

The practice of *pardah* and *ghunghat* (terms used by Muslims and Hindus in the Indian Subcontinent respectively) is one of the most public displays of gender performance in South Asia.[225] Although the tradition of *pardah* was part of both Hindu and Muslim communities of India the practice affected Muslim women more so because for them, "it was symbolic of not only status, but also of religious identity."[226] Studying the region of Makran, in Pakistani province of Balochistan, Carroll Pastner tries to understand the concept of honor, shame, and *pardah* in a region with historical influence

[225] Sonalde Desai and Lester Andrist, "Gender Scripts and Age at Marriage in India." *Deomography* 47, no. 3 (2010): 670.

[226] Gail Minault, "Coming Out: Decisions to Leave Purdah." *India International Center Quarterly* 23, no. 3/4 (1996): 103.

- Aisha Lee Fox Shaheed, "Dress Codes and Modes: How Islamic is the Veil?" In *The Veil: Women Writers on its History, Lore, and Politics*, edited by Jennifer Heath, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 293. The debate about veiling in Islam should not start with theology but by politics since whether and how Muslim women wear the veil depends not on whether Islam requires them to do so but instead on the requirements of the families, local religious authorities and governments.

from Persia, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Indian Subcontinent. Honor and shame, according to Pastner are, "concepts of correct conduct, especially the sexual conduct of women which is seen to reflect upon the status of male relatives."[227] This concept of honor and shame is protected largely by two methods: limiting women's physical mobility outside the home, and by using some form of veil in order to render women invisible if they need to be outside the home.[228]

There is a wide range in both forms of veiling and of the different parts of dress that are used for veiling in India. *Ghunghat/pardah* is pulled over the head and covers the face, while other forms may cover more or less of the body, like *chunri*, and *chadri*. The manner in which Indian women veiled themselves was not only tied to their religion but also to their caste, social class, and the region in which they lived. The veil is not simply a part of the dress "it has the capacity to signify a relationship between the self and the other."[229] Hence, the form of *pardah* that is used by different communities, or groups of women, makes a statement about their identity. It sets the wealthier women apart from those from the lower socio-economic classes; it sets upper-caste women apart from lower-caste; it also serves to create a separate identity for women belonging to different regions and religions.

As much as the form of veiling can be a signifier of identity and a sign of separation between the self and the other, its impact on the social construct is even more

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[227] Carroll Pastner, "A Social Structural and Historical Analysis of Honor, Shame, and Purdah," *Anthropology Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1972): 250.
[228] Pastner, "A Social Structural and Historical Analysis," 251.
[229] Jasbir Jain, "Purdah, Patriarchy, and the Tropical Sun: Womanhood in India." in *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics*, edited by Jennifer Heath, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 231.

significant. Women are not the only ones affected by the custom. Men too are impacted as it "defines the notion of both masculinity and femininity…and sustains the idea of patriarchy."[230] Veiling of women puts certain responsibilities upon men, which may become cumbersome and a burden in some families. That is why many women who wanted to come out of *pardah* in the early twentieth century made their case by stating how leaving the practice would ease some of the burden on men.

Those engaging in extreme forms of *pardah*, i.e. seclusion, tend to be from the wealthier class, since women's labor is not required in the family. Hence, *pardah* is influenced by social mobility to quite an extent, as it is a status symbol as well. One of the most significant effects of the *pardah* tradition is that females in a society such as the Makran region do not have access to formal education once they reach puberty.[231] Women's rights in this type of society, whether they are educational, or marital, are tied not to what is the norm for a larger region like a country, but instead to their limited kinship group. Honor and shame, hence, are best protected not only through physical *pardah* but also through another form of seclusion – keeping women within the kin group through practice of endogamy.[232]

The debate over veiling in Muslim societies went from being a private affair to a public one in the nineteenth century. Colonial powers tried to show the inferiority of Islam by focusing on its treatment of women. Veiling became a symbol of Islam's

[230] Jain, "Purdah, Patriarchy, and the Tropical Sun," 231-32.
[231] Pastner, "A Social Structural and Historical Analysis," 252-53. The requirement of purdah goes from puberty to menopause.
[232] Pastner, "A Social Structural and Historical Analysis," 255-56. This dependence of women's rights entirely upon kinship significantly effect the lives of widows and divorcées who may have to rely on their kin even for their physical survival.

oppressive nature against women and this oppressiveness of Islam came to be seen as a reason for its backwardness. Much of this rhetoric was also fueled by language of feminism that was taking hold in Western societies.[233] The dominance of colonial culture was able to produce a large group of middle class men and women in India who adopted western values and started opposing practices such as the veil.[234]

Muslim women in India started a movement against the tradition of *pardah* during the early years of the twentieth-century. One of the prominent women in this movement was Atiya Fyzee of Bombay, Iqbal's friend. However, for most women the decision to leave *pardah* was not one of defiance of tradition, or one that they took on their own. Their families were involved in the decision-making process, especially the men of the family. A common argument that women used against *pardah* was that the lives of men would improve by the discontinuation of the tradition.[235] Many women started coming out of *pardah* during the early twentieth century because of the awareness that took place during the nationalist movement. The political struggle for self-determination at the time raised the consciousness of men and they started realizing that women were capable of making their own decisions.[236]

Gail Minault cites several examples of how women came out of *pardah*. Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz (1896-1979) stopped veiling in the 1920s when her father, a political figure from the Punjab and Education Member in the Viceroy's cabinet, asked the women

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[233] Imtiaz Ahmad, "Why is the Veil Such a Contentious Issue?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 49 (2006): 5037.
[234] Ahmad, "Why is the Veil," 5038. In Egypt a nineteenth-century intellectual Qasim Amin proposed abandoning the veil; and in Turkey, Kemal Ataturk administratively outlawed the veil in the early twentieth century.
[235] Minault, "Coming Out," 96.
[236] Minault, "Coming Out," 102.

of his family to discard their veils. He did not like the idea of his wife and daughters not being able to attend social gatherings with him. He also held the view, that like Hindu women, Muslim women too should play a part in the nationalist struggle and the nation-building process. Begum Shah Nawaz went on do exactly that when she became one of the first members of the All-India Women Conference. She was also one of the founders of the women's branch of the Muslim League and was elected to the Punjab Legislative Assembly in 1937.[237]

The case of Masuma Begum (1902-1990) is a little different, explains Gail Minault. She was from a Hyderabadi family that observed strict *pardah*. Masuma Begum's Oxford educated cousin, whom she married in 1922, was the one to bring her out of the veiling tradition. She gave up veiling at parties that she and her husband attended, however she kept wearing a *burqah* when in public till Independence. Like Begum Shah Nawaz, Masuma Begum contested in the 1952 general elections for the state legislature. She served two terms and served as the Education and Social Welfare Minister for the state of Andhra Pradesh.[238]

However, Gail Minault informs us that Rashid Jahan (1905-1952) and Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991) are examples of women who made the decision to leave *pardah* on their own and even in opposition to their families' desires. Rashid Jahan started out at Aligarh Girls' School but when she went to Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow she stopped veiling. In 1929, she earned her medical degree from Lady Harding Medical College in Delhi. Upon moving back to Lucknow, Rashid Jahan became part of a writer's

[237] Minault, "Coming Out," 94.
[238] Minault, "Coming Out," 95-96.

collective. During her association with the writer's collective she published her short stories *Dillī kī Sair* and *Pardē kē Pīchē* that dealt with life of women behind the veil. It is worth doing a close reading of *Dillī kī Sair* because in this story the author also rescues the institution of *pardah* as an institution of women's empowerment—it affords women protection against undesirable gazes; it allows them to see the world without being seen by it.[239] The collection, *Angārē*, in which these and other stories challenged social and religious conventions, became one of the inspirations for the literary movement known as the Progressive Writers' Movement mentioned earlier.[240]

Ismat Chughtai, who was influenced by Rashid Jahan while at school in Aligarh, also went to Isabella Thoburn College where she earned her B.A. in 1938. It was at college that Chughtai gave up the veil and did not acquiesce even when she was seen and reprimanded by her uncle for being without the veil.[241] Chughtai earned her Bachelor of Teaching and went on to teach, and then went on to become the inspectress of municipal girls' schools in Bombay. In 1942, Chughtai published her short story *Lihāf*, which was a story about a woman's sexual frustration and intimacy with another woman.[242] Writers and stories like these challenged the norms and assumptions people held about women. These women tried to show that women, just like men, have identities of their own, and they have similar desires and aspirations.

Rashid Jahan and Ismat Chughtai were both exposed to higher education. Their access to this education took them away from home and brought them into contact with

[239] See Snehal Shingavi, tr. *Angaaray*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2014).
[240] Minault, "Coming Out," 96-97.
[241] Minault, "Coming Out," 98.
[242] Minault, "Coming Out," 99.

the larger world outside. Both women went on to have careers of their own and were not solely dependent on any man. Their education, coupled with some level of independence, must have served as a source of empowerment, which allowed them to challenge society's conventions not only in their literary pursuits but also in their personal lives.

nāraẓāmandī kī shādī - Nonconsensual marriage[243]

baġẖēr marẓī kī shādī bhī kyā qiyāmat hai!
yah umr bhar kē liyē ik muhīb l'anat hai

hai is kā ġhamkadah-e-hind mēṅ ravāj bohat!
baġhēr māṅgē milā kartē haiṅ yah tāj bohat!

yah shādī voh hai jisē vālidēn kartē haiṅ!
adā samajh kē usē farẓ 'ain kartē haiṅ!

yah kuch ẓurūr nahīṅ jānbīn rāẓī hoṅ!
yah sharṭ hai keh faqat vālidēn rāẓī hoṅ!

kaho ab in zan-o-shauhar kā ḥāl kyā hogā!
is azdavāj kā ākhir māāl kya hogā?

tamām 'umr rahīn alam hu'ī keh nahīṅ!
tamām zindagī ab ṣirf ġham hu'ī keh nahīṅ!

yah nosh-e-zahar-e-aṣar ko'ī ab p'iē keh marē
ko'ī batā'ē yah m'aṣum ab j'iē keh marrē

yah shādī āh jahannam kā rāj keh'iē isē
sarīr-e-'ishq peh kānToṅ kā tāj keh'iē isē

yah shādī kyā hai faqaṯ talḳhīyoṅ kā maḳhzan hai
javāṅ diloṅ kī jawāṅ ḥasratoṅ kā madfan hai

qadīm daur-e-jahālat kā ik sha'ār hai yah!
keh vālidēn kā nājā'iz iḳhtiyār hai yah!

ḥasīn ārzū'oṅ kā yah żibaḥ ḳhānā hai!
sarod-e-dard kā ik dozaḳhī tarānā hai!

[243] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 958-59.

javāṅ diloṅ ko yah shādī tabāh kartī hai!
shaguftah hoṅToṅ ko maṣrūf āh kartī hai!

sarūr-e-zehar hai yah nūr-e-tīrah fām hai yah!
nishāṭ-e-talḳh hai yah 'ishrat-e-ḥarām hai yah!

gulū-e-'aish mēṅ ik l'anatoṅ kā hār hai yah!
savād-e-hind mēṅ shaitāṅ kī yādgār hai yah!

yah bādah hai keh jis mēṅ milā huā hai zehar
yah shehad woh hai keh jis mēṅ chupā huā hai zehar

javān rūḥoṅ kī ḳhāmosh qatalgāh hai yah!
ḳhudā kē nām peh sab baṛā gunāh hai yah!

What a calamity is marriage without choice!
It is a grim curse for a lifetime

Its tradition reigns supreme in the sorry state of Hind
Without asking such crowns are given out all the time!

This is a marriage, which is between the parents!
They fulfill it thinking it an obligation!

It isn't necessary that both sides are accepting!
The only requirement is that the parents agree!

Say, what will happen to the husband and wife now!
What will be the end of this marriage?

Did the whole life get mortgaged to anguish or not!
Has the whole life become only sorrow or not!

Should someone drink this effective sweetened poison or die
Someone tell, should this innocent live or die

This marriage, alas! Call it the rule of hell
Call it a crown of thorns on the body of pleasure

What is this marriage but a treasury of bitterness
It is the grave of the youthful desires of young hearts

It is a sign of the ancient era of ignorance!

Or is it an unlawful authority of the parents!

It is the slaughterhouse of beautiful wishes!
It is the hellish anthem of painful melody!

Such marriage destroys young hearts!
The happy lips are busied with sighs!

It is a delightful poison; this is a dark colored light!
It is a bitter delight; it is a prohibited pleasure!

Around the neck of pleasure it is a garland of curses!
It is a monument to Satan in Hindustan's environ!

This is that wine in which poison is mixed
It is that honey in which poison is hidden

It is the silent murder house of young spirits!
This is all a sin committed in the name of God!

Arranged marriage is a deep-rooted custom in India practiced by people of all religious persuasions. Most of the marriages that take place in India are a result of arrangements made by family elders of the two families. Sometimes, in case of the adults who are to be wed, their opinions are taken into account. However, generally speaking, "love is considered a weak basis for marriage" because custom requires that partners join in matrimony for practical purposes, like becoming parents, merging of property, creating social alliances and companionship; love is believed to grow later in the marriage.[244]

Akhtar Shirani challenges this custom calling it the greatest sin committed in India and all in the name of God. His opposition to the custom is quite evident even from his choice of the title of this poem "Nonconsensual Marriage." Even though the partners-to-be are consulted in some cases, Shirani views this practice as one that does not truly

[244] Giri Raj Gupta, "Love, Arranged Marriage, and the Indian Social Structure." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 7, no. 1 (1976): 77.

allow the partners any real choice. He brings this point to light when he writes that it is of no consequence whether those who are to be wed agree or not; it is only the parents of the two that need to be in agreement. The only thing this custom accomplishes is to take away the happiness of young people, and their lives are mortgaged to life-long despair.

He not only disparages this tradition as an atrocity based on social customs, he also appears to be challenging the religious justification of this practice. This becomes apparent from the types of words he uses to describe the practice from the very first verse. He compares arranged marriage, or marriage without choice, to *qayāmat* (calamity, or the Day of Judgment); as if those being wed are not a bride and groom standing in front of the wedding officiator, but rather sinners who stand before God, ready to be handed down their final judgment. He goes on to call such marriage the rule of hell, referencing the religious metaphor of heaven and hell, where hell (and thus the marriage) is the place of eternal torment. It is a crown of thorns, like the one thrust upon Jesus's head as he dragged the cross upon which he was to be crucified. Such a marriage is much like the torturous last walk Jesus took to Golgotha, the hill where he was nailed to the cross. Arranged marriage is the start of a similar journey, which ends in the death of all hopes and desires of young hearts. This type of marriage is anathema to the happiness and peace of the couple, that Shirani calls it a monument to Satan that is erected all over India.

Although arranged marriages affect both men and women the custom has more negative effects for women. The cruel nature of this practice becomes even clearer when one considers the effect it has on those girls who are married off at a young age. By the

custom of arranged marriage a girl is often married before she reaches puberty. Cohabitation and consummation of such marriages generally takes place once the girl has reached puberty.[245] However, when we take the ages of these girls into account one can see that cohabitation, consummation of marriage, and first birth, all occur while the girl is still fairly young.[246] The young age of marriage means lower level of education not just for girls, but for boys as well. Furthermore, girls who are married at a young age tend to have a lower social status and low rates of participation in the labor force, which would make them dependent entirely on their husbands and in-laws for their economic well being.[247]

In the early 1900s *Anjuman-i-Khavatin-i-Islam* (All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference), a women's rights organization, brought the issue to light as well. The organization wanted to ensure that women received a well-rounded education - not just religious, but practical education as well. For this purpose they proposed that no girl should be married before the age of sixteen. According to the organization, early marriage was detrimental to the education of all Indian women because it led women to end their education prematurely.[248]

Shirani also understood the value of education and in the next poem he tries to convey the passionate desire of every girl to be educated:

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[245] David Bloom and P.H. Reddy, "Age Patterns of Women at Marriage, and First Birth in India." *Demography* 23, no. 4 (1986): 511.
[246] Bloom and Reddy, "Age Patterns of Women," 516. Statistics form 1975 show that the mean age of ever married women in rural India at menarche was slightly over 13 years; the age at marriage and cohabitation ranged between 14-15 years; and first birth occurred between the ages of 16-17 years of age. The ages of women living in urban areas were the same for menarche; 16 years of age for marriage and cohabitation; and 18 years at first birth.
[247] Bloom and Reddy, "Age Patterns of Women," 509.
[248] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 286-87.

madrase kī laṛkiyon kī du'ā (bacciyon ke liyē) - Prayer of the schoolgirls (For young girls)[249]

yā rab yahī du'ā hai tujh sē sadā hamārī
himmat baṛhā hamārī, qismat banā hamārī!

ta'līm mēṅ kuch aisī, ham sab karēṅ taraqqī
ġhēroṅ kī intihā bhī, ho ibtidā hamārī!

nafrat burā'ī sē ho, ulfat bhalā'ī sē ho
raġhbat ṣafā'ī sē ho, yah hai du'ā hamārī!

kehnā baṛoṅ kā mānēṅ, acchā baṛoṅ ko mānēṅ
sab apnē jī mēṅ ṭhānēṅ, yah hai razā hamārī!

tērē karam kā sāyā, har dam ho sar peh chāyā
tērī madad ḳhudāyā, ho rehnumā hamārī!

har 'ilm kē ḳhazānē, pā'ēṅ na'ē purānē
is ṯaraḥ sē ṭhikānē, meḥnat lagā hamārī!

paṛh likh kar nām pā'ēṅ, kuch kām kar dikhā'ēṅ
tērē ḥuẓūr mēṅ hai, yah iltijā hamārī!

Oh God, this is our perpetual prayer to you
Increase our courage; make our fate better!

That we succeed in education in such a way
That the limits of others are only our beginnings!

There should be an aversion towards wickedness and intimacy with goodness
There should be an inclination towards cleanliness; this is our prayer to you!

That we obey our elders; and think of them well
All of these things should be fixed in our heart, that is our wish!

May the shade of your grace always remain upon our heads
Your help Lord should be our guide!

That we get the treasure of all knowledge, old and new
Make our efforts come to fruition in such a way!

[249] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 963.

That through education we accomplish something and shine
This is our request before you!

The educational opportunities that society provides for women are related to how a society sees its women and what social status women occupy in that society. As it had been before the British takeover of India, women's lower status compared to men did not grant them equal access to education in colonial times. Both before and during much of the colonial period there was no organized formal education for women. Whatever little education women received was informal and provided to them within the family.[250]

Early social reformists in India believed that social customs like child marriage, *sati, pardah*, and lack of education were the driving force behind women's lower status in society. The social reform movement started during the early nineteenth century challenged these customs within the framework of a Hindu revivalist agenda. These reformers and their movement were mainly targeted towards making the lives of higher caste women better. Even though they challenged certain customs that they saw as backwards, they did not let go of their patriarchal ideals, which viewed Hindu women as selfless, self-sacrificing, and mothers and wives, submitting to the overall guidance of men.[251]

These early reformers saw education as holding the key to raising the status of women. However, different groups of reformists targeted the issue of education for different reasons. Cultural revivalists wanted to champion women's education because they saw women as the ones who could preserve Indian culture and tradition in the face

[250] A.R. Kamat, "Women's Education and Social Change in India." *Social Scientist* 5, no. 1 (1976): 3.
[251] Ila Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement and Women's Education in India." *International Review of Education* 44, no. 2/3 (1998): 157-58.

of growing influence of westernization. Others, like the liberal social reformers, wanted women to be educated so that upper caste women could be better companions to their educated and westernized male partners. None of these early reformers wanted to educate women so that the women could contribute to society outside of the home. These reformers promoted women's education only because they wanted "to improve their traditional roles within the patriarchal family."[252]

The nationalist movement for Independence further helped the issue of women's education by causing an awakening, regarding principles of equality and opportunity, because these principles were believed to contribute to national development. Starting in the 1920s more and more women joined the struggle for independence and started a women's movement. Through their participation in the nationalist movement women were able to redefine gender roles. Organizations such as Indian Women's Association (1917), and the All-India Women's Conference (1927), also known as the *Akhil Hind Mahila Parishad*, were established to organize and mobilize women in the nationalist struggle. The organizations also promoted the issue of raising women's status through education, social reform, and politics.[253] However, these early reformist and women's movements were elitist in nature and their reforms were aimed at Hindu women of higher castes. Even though these movements addressed education of the upper caste women they failed to promote education among women of lower castes and among Muslim women.[254]

[252] Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement," 158.
[253] Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement," 159.
[254] Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement," 160.

Less access to education for women was not only due to their lower status, but as discussed earlier, also due to women being the representatives of a family's honor. Muslim women had their own obstacles that had not been addressed by some of the early women's movements. In some Muslim families it was considered dangerous for a woman to know how to write, for she may indulge in writing letters to men, thereby bringing shame upon the family.[255] As discussed earlier Muslim leaders like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan proposed basic education rights for women, just enough so that they could take care of the household and have enough knowledge so as not to follow ignorant customs.[256]

With families holding such opinions towards educating women many Muslim women resorted to alternative ways of acquiring education. Gail Minault describes how Abadi Banu Begam (1852-1924), also known as Bi Amman, had her nephew read to her from storybooks. She would memorize the stories and then reread them; this became the method through which she educated herself. Another was Ashrafunnissa Begam (1840-1903), also known as Bibi Ashraf, who took to copying poetry by using ink made from coal residue from the stove. She later offered to teach a male cousin the Qur'an in exchange for reading lessons.[257]

Towards the close of the nineteenth century much progress had been made towards bringing the issue of women's education as a necessity to the forefront. People like Nazir Ahmad (1833?-1912) were breaking away from the traditional home-based education view that people like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan held. Nazir Ahmad had no doubt

[255] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 24. Furthermore, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan considered women to be inherently inferior to men, both physically and intellectually and should be confined to the homes to protect their modesty (p. 30).
[256] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 30.
[257] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 26-28.

that women were just as capable as men intellectually and that their intelligence, understanding, and memory were equal to men.[258] However, female literacy rates in the nineteenth century in India remained negligible. The literacy rate of all women in India, regardless of class and religion, was at 0.2 percent in 1881, increasing to 1.8 percent by 1921.[259]

The custom of *pardah* was a significant issue when it came to women's access to education; this was even more so for Muslim families. Other issues that encumbered women's access to education were of finding enough female teachers, and how to ensure an adequate standard for instruction.[260] Another point of debate was how the education of women would be conducted, whether it was to be at home or at schools. By the early twentieth century economic realities settled this issue with the realization that the only economically viable way to educate women was by establishing schools for women.[261]

In order to convince conservative families to allow their daughters to attend school separate female schools with female teachers were established. These separate institutions for girls were not without their problems, however. It was often difficult to recruit enough qualified women teachers since there were not many educated women to become teachers. The lack of qualified teachers was even more profound in small towns and rural areas, and meant that the educational standards often suffered in girls-only schools.[262]

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[258] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 35-36.
[259] Kamat, "Women's Education," 4.
[260] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 162.
[261] Minault, *Secluded Scholars*, 215.
[262] Kamat, "Women's Education," 6.

After Independence, in 1947, the Constitution of India made it mandatory for all to receive elementary education up to the eighth grade. The directive was meant to ensure that each child between the ages of 6-14 would have received eight years of education by the year 1960. This mark was not met due to low enrollments of girls, and even boys from scheduled castes and tribes. Up until the 1970s one third of the girls between the ages of 6-11 did not enroll in school, and among those who did enroll a third dropped out during first grade. This meant that education for girls of all sections of society did not receive adequate attention even after independence and nearly half of the girls remained illiterate.[263]

Lack of access to education was not the only problem that contributed to women's inferior role in society. The report *Towards Equality* issued by the Committee on the Status of Women in India pointed out that educational policies like sexual bias in the curriculum also perpetuated the subordination of women and helped to form negative attitudes regarding women's role in society. In the 1980s, the urban women's movement took up the cause of pointing out sexual bias in school curricula. Their main protests were against how textbooks portrayed division of labor in such a biased way that it reinforced women's subordination, while privileging men's authority and knowledge.[264]

Since the 1980s the discipline of women's studies in India has tried to shift the debate from concerns of the upper and middle class women to promoting issues that

[263] Kamat, "Women's Education," 7-8. The 1971 Indian census showed that the male/female literacy was as follows: Total population: males 89.5, females 18.4; Rural: males 33.1, females 12.9; Urban: males 61.0, females 41.5. For schedules castes the total percentage of literate male/female numbers were much lower: males 22.2 and females 6.9. Scheduled tribes' total percentages were lower still: males 17.4 and females 4.8.

[264] Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement," 161. The Comprehensive report on the status of women was commissioned by the Indian government in 1975 – the International Year For Women.

concern poor women.[265] Academics have pointed out that differences in access to education has led to increasing gender inequality and has caused a new division in society, one between educated and uneducated women. They have also focused on the continuation of curricular differentiation in educational institutions, which continues despite policies meant to curtail it. Furthermore, academics have critiqued how education has not fulfilled its promise in changing society's attitudes towards issues like dowry, domestic violence, and eve-teasing (verbal sexual harassment of women), attitudes that remain prevalent among the educated middle class. Since the mid-1980s women's studies has attempted to promote the idea that the purpose of education should not only be to raise the status of women by helping them economically, but its purpose should also be to promote a new kind of thinking and to change society's values.[266]

Education, which is seen as crucial to raising the status of women and for bringing about a shift in cultural values, needs to be empowering. Empowering education is one that does not simply impose existing forms of knowledge on women. Empowering education respects and values traditional and existing women's knowledge. Furthermore, empowering education needs to have a focus on "awareness-building, social analysis, critical reflection, and organizational skills" that lead to mobilization of women.[267] These goals for women's education are crucial so that education does not simply mean that women raise their economic status while still being burdened by the patriarchal customs that keep them subordinate to men. Education that empowers women has to allow that

[265] Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement," 163.
[266] Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement," 164.
[267] Patel, "The Contemporary Women's Movement," 168.

women can mobilize and effect positive changes in their lives without having to play by rules set by men.

Akhtar Shirani acknowledges and highlights these concerns when the girls in his poem pray for education. In the poem, the girls want to achieve such heights of knowledge that the highest extreme for others should be only their beginning. They want access to knowledge both old and new, not just the old form of knowledge, which keeps the patriarchal system alive and ensures their subordinate status. These girls aspire to make a name for themselves, and they want to show the world that through proper, empowering education, they can achieve true equality and control their own fates.

In the following poem we encounter another form of resistance from Shirani, one against the deteriorating state of the Urdu language in India due to the politicization of this language, especially vis-à-vis Hindi. Shirani was challenging and changing the traditional norms in Urdu poetry by bringing in the named, feminine beloved into the *ghazal* world. As a trailblazer in this ascpet, he must have realized the power of language to influence the thinking of people who identify with it:

hamāri zubāṅ (tarānā) - Our Language (an anthem)[268]

yā rab rahē salāmat urdū zubāṅ hamārī
har lafz par hai jis kē qurbāṅ jāṅ hamārī!

maṣrī sī toltā hai – shakkar sī g̲holtā hai
jo ko'ī boltā hai mīṭhī zubāṅ hamārī!

hindū ho pārsī ho 'īsā'ī ho keh muslim
har ēk kī zubāṅ hai urdū zubāṅ hamārī!

duniyā kī boliyoṅ sē maṯlab nahīṅ hamēṅ kuch

[268] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 1043-44.

urdū hai dil hamarā urdū hai jāṅ hamārī

duniyā kī kul zubānēṅ buṛhī sī ho cukī haiṅ
lēkin abhī javāṅ hai urdū zubāṅ hamārī!

apnī zubāṅ sē hai 'izzat jahāṅ mēṅ apnī
gar ho zubāṅ nah apnī 'izzat kahāṅ hamārī!

urdū kī god mēṅ ham pal kar baṛē hu'ē haiṅ
so jāṅ sē ham ko piyārī urdū zubāṅ hamārī!

āzād-o-mīr-o-ġhālib ā'ēṅ gē yād barsoṅ
kartī hai nāz jin par urdū zubāṅ hamārī!

afrīqah ho 'arab ho amrīkah ho keh yorap (Europe)
puhuncī kahāṅ nahīṅ hai urdū zubāṅ hamārī!

miṭ jā'ēṅ gē magar ham miṭnē nah dēṅ gē is ko
hai jān-o-dil sē piyārī ham ko zubān hamārī!

O' Lord may our Urdu language remain safe!
On each word of which we sacrifice our lives!

He judges it like rock-candy – mixes sugar-like sweetness[269]
Whoever speaks this sweet language of ours!

Hindu, Zoroastrian, Christian, or Muslim
Urdu is the language of each!

We do not have anything to do with other languages
Urdu is our heart and Urdu is our life!

The whole world's languages have become somewhat stale
Our Urdu however is still young!

We have respect in the world due to our language
If we do not have our own language how will we have respect!

We have been raised in the lap of Urdu
Hence our Urdu language is dearer that life to us!

[269] Misri is heavier and coarser in appearance than sugar.

Azad, Mir, and Ghalib will be remembered for ages
Those whom Urdu takes pride in!

Whether it is Africa, Arabia, America, or Europe
Where has not our Urdu language reached!

We will perish but will not let *it* perish
Our Urdu language is dearer to us than our lives!

In the 1830s the British replaced Persian with English for the purpose of higher administration in India, and allowed for various Indian vernaculars to be used for lower level administration. In northern India, Urdu (in the Persian script) became the vernacular, while Hindi (in the Nagari script) was not granted official status. This was the beginning of a process of politicization and division of what was once a single language written in two different scripts. In the central provinces Hindi, with its Nagari script, started replacing Urdu for administrative purposes by the 1870s and 1880s.[270]

The British government of India played an important role in politicizing the issue of language that created communal divisions between Hindus and Muslims. These policies, such as which language or script to use in which region, were a result of how the British viewed Indian society – divided largely into Hindus and Muslims.[271] The Hunter Commission of 1882, which influenced educational policy on India, established a link

[270] King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, 53.
- A. Aneesh, "Bloody Language: Clashes and Constructions of Linguistic Nationalism in India." *Sociological Forum* 25, no. 1 (2010): 94. The grammar of both Hindi and Urdu can be traced back to *Khari Boli*, which was widely spoken in northern India.
- Sudha Pai, "Politics of Language: Decline of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh." *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 27 (2002): 2706. Another noteworthy fact regarding the commonality of Urdu and Hindi is represented by the fact that the first weekly newspaper in the United Provinces "*Benares Akhbar*" and the later "*Sarvahitkarak*" in 1885 were both published in a mixture of Hindi and Urdu.
[271] King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, 17.
- King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, 116. The British policies were often inconsistent and whereas they recognized Hindi and Urdu as separate subjects in schools they did not initially grant an equal status to Hindi and the Nagari script in courts and administrative offices.

between language and employment prospects as well. This mobilized language associations to promote their interests. Then in the early twentieth century the government assigned Grierson to conduct a linguistic survey of India. Grierson traced the roots of north Indian languages to either Sanskrit, or Arabic/Persian sources, and his findings further established a divide between the two languages.[272] It was this politicization of language, and the way in which the British formed language policies that aided the Partition of India.[273]

This conscious differentiation and split in languages created new identity markers and slogans such as "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" and Urdu, Muslim, Pakistan" started to come about.[274] According to this line of thinking, Hindi was the language for Hindus, whose home was Hindustan. Urdu, by this reasoning became the language of Muslims, with their home in Pakistan. Religious affiliation had already played a role in Indian politics, now language too became a marker of religious differences once Hindi and Urdu became linked to the Hindu and Muslim religions. According to this equation, Muslims and their Urdu language could not be part of a Hindu Hindustan. This in essence relegated Indian Muslims to the status of second-class citizens.[275] Sentiments like these,

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[272] Pai, "Politics of Language," 2706.

[273] King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, 53.

- King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, 75. British officials also often failed to distinguish between language and script, which influenced how different parties, viewed language.
- Pai, "Politics of Language," 2706. Furthermore, the government may have used language as a political tool to divide Hindus and Muslims in the early 1900s, and undermine their unity over issues like the plague and law and order situation. The government did not want to deal with a joint force of Hindus and Muslims challenging its rule in the sub-continent.

[274] Aneesh, "Bloody Language," 101.

[275] Aneesh, "Bloody Language," 103-04. Hindu and Muslim nationalist movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s viewed Hindus and Muslims as separate nations within India. The Swadeshi movement not only challenged British rule but also opposed the past Muslim rule of India. Muslim leaders like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan wanted to develop a new Muslim consciousness in India. He was one of the first leaders to

which made Muslims, and especially Urdu out to be non-native to India inspired the following verses of Rashid Banarsi. These verses correctly capture the mood of those left nonplussed by the move to make Muslims and Urdu foreign to India.

bohat samjhē thē ham is daur kī fīrqah parastī ko
zubāṅ bhī shēḳh-o-brahman hai ham nahīṅ samjhē

agar urdū pe bhī ilzām hai bahar sē ānē kā
to phir hindustān kis kā vatan hai ham nahīṅ samjhē[276]

I understood the divisions of this era quite well
But language too has a religion? I do not comprehend

If Urdu is also charged with not being native
Then whose homeland is Hindustan? I do not understand

After Partition this division of Urdu and Hindi became an issue of concern to Urdu speakers in India. The nation state of India carved out many of its states on the basis of language. The majority of the population in each state speaks one language and most of the speakers of any given language live in the same state. Urdu is neither the official language of a state, nor in contention to be a national language. Hindi, however, has seen a gradual growth as the national language.[277] Indian leaders like Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had supported the use of Hindustani (based on the common grammar

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challenge the idea of a National Congress since Hindus and Muslim were different nations, with different aims and aspirations.
- Barbara D. Metcalf, "Urdu in India in the 21st Century: A Historian's Perspective." *Social Scientist* 31, no. 5/6 (2003): 31. The Hindu nationalists also viewed Urdu as the language of decadence, associated with the *nawabi* culture, in contrast to Hindi, which was the language of respectable people. Muslim reformers on the other had tried to portray the refined status of Urdu and dismissed Hindi as the language of country bumpkins.

[276] Metcalf, "Urdu in India," 29.

[277] King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, p. 5.

used by Urdu and Hindi) as a possible national language.[278] However, since Urdu became the official language of Pakistan after Partition Indian leaders like Ananthasayanam Ayyangar (1891-1978) suggested that there was no longer any need to maintain Urdu as one of the languages of India.[279]

Once India and Pakistan became separate nation states, and Urdu became the official language of Pakistan, its position in India became even more precarious. Many members of the Congress Party became adamant after Partition that Hindi should be made the official language of India.[280] In 1951 the Official Language Act declared Hindi the official language in the United Provinces where there was a significant Urdu speaking population. The Official Language Act meant that Hindi became the sole language of instruction and examinations at the high school level. After the passage of the act the government withdrew funding for Urdu medium schools, which harmed the status and future of Urdu even further.[281] Nehru was against such opposition towards Urdu and argued that the acceptance of Urdu as a second language in UP would not effect the growth of Hindi in any way. The leaders in the United Provinces however felt that Urdu had essentially become the language of Muslims, and since Urdu already had a home in the Muslim Pakistan it did not need to be supported.[282]

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[278] Aneesh, "Bloody Language," 98-99. Hindustani was the name given to the common language spoken by most northern Indian people, which was a simple version of Urdu. Some leaders challenged that the highly Sanskritized Hindi which was being promoted by some Hindu nationalist groups was not spoken by majority of the people.
[279] Aneesh, "Bloody Language," 99.
[280] Pai, "Politics of Language," 2706.
[281] Pai, "Politics of Language," 2707.
[282] Pai, "Politics of Language," 2707.

In 1972 Indira Gandhi set up a committee charged with recommending ways to advance Urdu. The committee issued a 250-page report in 1975, with its 187 recommendations, however there was such opposition in the northern states such as UP to promoting Urdu that no action was taken on the recommendations.[283] The anti-Urdu policies in the United Provinces have seen the steady decline of Urdu and Urdu instruction. The state where Urdu once flourished has almost no Urdu medium schools remaining, and very few teachers and books available for Urdu instruction. Parents who want their children to learn Urdu have to send them to madrasas, which are the only institutions where Urdu is taught. However, the quality of Urdu literary instruction at the madrasas is low since their primary interest is religious education, and they are not equipped for Urdu literature instruction.[284]

In post-independence India, it is not only the political opposition that has led to the decline of Urdu, but it is also the abandonment by the new generation of Urdu speakers themselves. Whereas in south India Tamil, Telegu, and Kanada found support in the middle classes who challenged the imposition of Hindi, very little similar support is available for Urdu. The middle class Urdu speakers in UP do not want to send their children to Urdu medium schools and have hence abandoned formal Urdu instruction.[285] This lack of support for Urdu instruction by Urdu speaking families may very well be because middle class parents do not want to deny their children the competitive advantage in higher education and employment that comes with English medium

[283] Pai, "Politics of Language," 2707. Later, in the 1980s UP's chief minister V.P. Singh tried to take steps to recognize Urdu as the second language of the state but did not succeed in doing so.
[284] Pai, "Politics of Language," 2707.
[285] Pai, "Politics of Language," 2708.

education. The same concern that Muslim leaders had during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Although Urdu has enjoyed support and patronage in Pakistan after independence its status as official language in Pakistan has not led to Urdu becoming the language of the majority of Pakistani people.[286] In fact the opposition to the position of Urdu partially led to East Pakistan's secession in 1971.[287] Since Pakistani national life requires the use of Urdu, it has a safe haven in Pakistan, but even then Urdu can only be a functional language at best. Urdu in Pakistan is not the language that makes the high literature and poets like Mir and Ghalib accessible to people. Its status in Pakistan is not one that will lead to a literary renaissance of Urdu.[288]

Akhtar Shirani is lamenting the precarious predicament of Urdu and its future in India when he prays for Urdu to remain safe. He is resisting its decline in India by focusing on its exalted past and beauty. He reminds the reader that Urdu is not associated with Islam, but instead has been the language of people of all religions of India. He recognizes the respect and status afforded to people who have their own language, and though several states in India are carved out on basis of language, Urdu does not get the same privilege. Extoling the virtues of Urdu he makes the bold claim that it is a language that is still developing and will continue to flourish, whereas other languages have

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[286] Tariq Rahman, "Language, Power, and Ideology," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 44/45 (2002): 4556. The census from 1981 shows the following breakdown of first language spoken by people in Pakistan by percentage: Punjabi 48.17; Pashto 13.14; Sindhi 11.77; Siraiki 9.83; Urdu 7.60; Balochi 3.02; Hindko 2.43; and Brahvi 1.21.

[287] Rahman, "Language, Power, and Ideology," 4558. Pakistani state used both Islam and Urdu as symbols of the state, while disregarding the linguistic identity of Bengali speaking East Pakistanis. Pakistani historians now agree that this policy was wrongly administered in the eastern wing of the county.

[288] Metcalf, "Urdu in India," 32. Quoting Professor Muhammad Umar Momen in "A Question of Literature." *The News* Karachi, August 30, 2001.

stopped developing. He reminds the reader that the great poets of Urdu will be remembered for ages. He comments on how far and wide Urdu has spread, away from its homeland; perhaps it is a prediction that even though Urdu may not survive in India, it will find itself a place in foreign lands.

intizār (*sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ*)
- The Wait (I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night)[289]

bahār-o-kaif kī badlī, utar ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ
surūr-o-nūr kā kauṡar chiṛak jā'ē gī vādī mēṅ
nasīm-e-bādiyah, manẕar ko mehkā'ē gī vādī mēṅ
shabāb-o-ḥusn kī bijlī sī lehrā'ē gī vādī mēṅ
sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ!

The cloud of spring and ecstasy will descend into the valley
She will sprinkle the fountain of joy and light in the valley
The desert breeze will fill the valley with a sweet scent
Lightning like energy of youth and beauty will wave in the valley
I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night!

abhī sē jā'ūṅ aur vādī kē naẕāroṅ sē keh ā'ūṅ
bichādēṅ farsh-e-gul vādī mēṅ, gulzāroṅ sē keh ā'ūṅ
chiṛak dēṅ mastiyāṅ, phūloṅ kī mehkāroṅ sē keh ā'ūṅ
keh salmā merī nūr barsā'ē gī vādī mēṅ!
sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ

I should go now and tell the sights of the valley
I should tell the gardens to spread a flowery floor in the valley
I should tell the fragrances of flowers to sprinkle intoxication
That Salma, my Salma, will rain light in the valley!
I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night

sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko vādī mēṅ ā'ē gī
barā'ē sēr is phūloṅ kī ābādī mēṅ ā'ē gī
ġhazāl-e-dasht ban kar rang-e-āzādī mēṅ ā'ē gī
aur ā kar nāz kī bastī basā jā'ē gi vādī mēṅ!
sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ!

[289] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 261-63.

I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night!
For the sake of amusement she will come to this habitat of flowers
Becoming the gazelle of the forest she will come in the color of freedom
And having come she will establish a settlement of coquetry
I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night!

bahār-e-vādī-e-rangīn ko yah mazhdah sunā ā'ūṅ
zamīṅ ko nakhat gulhā'ē ra'nā sē basā ā'ūṅ
aur us par nāznīṅ kaliyoṅ ka ik bistar bichā ā'ūṅ
keh voh nāzuk badan hai aur thak jā'ē gī vādī mēṅ
sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ!

I should deliver this good tiding to the spring of the colorful valley
I should infuse the ground with the fragrance of exquisite flowers
And upon that I should spread a bed of delicate flowers
That she is delicate and will tire easily in the valley
I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night

zamīṅ par bhēj dē āj ai bihisht apnī bahāroṅ ko
bichā dē ḳhāk par ai āsmāṅ apnē sitāroṅ ko
ḳhirām-o-raqṣ kā dē hukm fiṯrat. abarpāroṅ ko
voh bēḳhud cānd kī naẕroṅ sē ghabrā'ē gī vādī mēṅ
sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ!

Oh paradise, send your spring to the earth today
Oh sky, spread out stars upon the dirt today
Nature should give the order of dance and swaying to the clouds
She will be unnerved by the glances of the intoxicated moon in the valley
I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night

mirē āġhosh mēṅ hogā voh jism marmarīṅ us kā
voh us kē kākul mushkīṅ, voh rū'ē nāznīṅ us kā
voh rukhsār ḥasīṅ us kē, voh ḥasīṅ yāsmīṅ us kā
voh jis sē shauq kī duniyā ko mehkā'ē gī vādī mēṅ!
sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ!

In my lap will be her body, beautiful as marble
And her tied locks, that delicate countenance of hers
Those beautiful cheeks of hers, that pretty jasmine of hers
From which she will perfume this world of passion!
I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night

tamannā-o-ḥayā kī kashmakash kyūṅ kar miṭā'ūṅ gā
mēṅ us kē yāsmīṅ paikar ko kaisē gudgudā'ūṅ gā

aur us kē la'l lab sē kis ṯaraḥ rangat curā'ūṅ ga
voh phūloṅ aur sitāroṅ sē bhī sharmā'ē gī vādī mēṅ
sunā hai merī salmā rāt ko ā'ē gī vādī mēṅ!

Why would I end this struggle between desire and modesty?
How will I tickle her jasmine body?
And how will I steal the color of her ruby lips?
She will even be shy of the flowers and stars in the valley
I've heard my Salma will come to the valley at night

Poems like these are the reason why Akhtar Shirani's name became linked with romantic poetry. Even though there is no concrete evidence that Salma, or Rehana for that matter, existed, it is through numerous poems of desire and longing that specifically name these women as his object of affection that he is able to make them seem real. Shirani uses many of the established tropes to describe the beloved's affect when he extols Salma's many virtues, how she makes everything fragrant and fills the valley with passion. He also uses familiar sentiments when he describes many of his own actions as a beloved; how he would spread flowers through out the valley because his beloved is delicate and he does not want her to get hurt or get tired. He calls upon the heavens to assist him in making the valley ready for Salma's arrival. In the last stanza he admits that he does not want to sacrifice his desire for the sake of modesty and expected cultural norms, but he wonders how he will actually fulfill his desires of kissing Salma and tickling her beautiful body since she is so shy. Although his poetry follows the traditional conventions of romantic poetry, he differs from many poets because he gives his beloved a name.

He does not only put Salma in fanciful positions like the valley covered with flowers that she will fill with passion and perfume, he also writes poetry that describes

her mundane life. In his poem "Salma (at Noor Jahan's tomb)"[290] he writes verses like these:

andhērē maqbarē mēṅ ġham sē yūṅ parēshāṅ hai
fiẓā kī god mēṅ goyā keh sham'a giryāṅ hai
shab-e-siyāh mēṅ saiyārā ashk afshaṅ hai

In the dark tomb she is perturbed due to sadness
As if a candle were shedding tears in the lap of the air
In the dark night the planet is sprinkled with tears

ṯilā'ī hāth uṭhē kis kē fātiḥah kē liyē
fiẓā'ēṅ hoga'īṅ bētāb iltijā kē liyē
ḳhudā'ī kaṅp uṭhī jazbah-e-du'ā kē liyē

Whose golden hands were raised for prayer for the dead?
The winds became restless in supplication
Divinity trembled for the passion of prayer

yah rang dēḳh kē ranjūr ho rahā hūṅ mēṅ
sharāb-e-dard sē maḳhmūr ho rahā hūṅ mēṅ
biyān-e-hāl peh majbūr ho rahā hūṅ mēṅ

Having seen this I am becoming aggrieved
I am being leavened by the wine of pain
I am being compelled to describe this scene

In these selected verses from the poem, Shirani paints an image as if he is there, observing Salma go about her life. But he is not just an observer; he is deeply moved by Salma's actions at the tomb. He can empathize with her while he admires her.

In the next poem Shirani describes the night he met and perhaps consummated his love with Salma. Although he uses many of the familiar love tropes, he places Salma yet again not in some fanciful location, but a real place, the city of Gujarat. It is through

[290] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 241-243.

poems like this that he has created a whole identity for Salma; and it is also perhaps why people have believed that Salma was indeed a real person that Shirani was in love with:

Gujrāt kī rāt - Night of Gujarat[291]

āj qismat sē naẕar ā'ī hai barsāt kī rāt
kiyā bigaṛ jā'ē gā reh jā'o yahīṅ rāt kī rāt

in kī pābūsī ko jā'ē to ṣabā keh dēnā
āj tak yād hai voh āp kē gujrāt kī rāt

jis mēṅ salmā kē taṣavur kē haiṅ tārē raushan
mērī āṅkhoṅ mēṅ hai voh 'ālam-e-jażbāt kī rāt

hā'ē voh mast ghaṭā hā'ē voh salmā kī adā
āh voh rod-e-canāb āh voh gujrāt kī rāt

mērē sīnē peh idhar zulf-e-mu'aṯar kā hujūm
(āh voh zulf keh āvārah ḳharābat kī rāt

saṯaḥ-e-daryā peh idhar nashē mēṅ lehrā'ī hū'ī
rang lā'ī hū'ī, chā'ī hū'ī barsāt kī rāt

uf voh so'ī hū'ī kho'ī hū'ī fiṯrat kī bahār
uf voh mehkī hū'ī behkī hū'ī barsat kī rāt

phir voh armān-e-hamāġoshī kā jazb-e-gustāḳh
āh voh rāt voh salmā sē mulāqāt kī rāt

kyūṅ nah un donoṅ peh miṭnē kī ho ḥasrat akhtar
uf voh us rāt kī bāt, āh voh us bāt kī rat

Today, through good fortune we can observe the stormy night
What harm will come? Just stay here for the night

If it goes for their worship, then call it the zephyr
Till today I remember that night of your Gujarat

The stars of Salma's imagination shine bright in it
In my eyes that is the night of the state of passion

[291] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 79-80.

Ah, that intoxicating breeze! Ah, that coquetry of Salma!
Ah, that river Chenab! Ah, that night of Gujarat!

Upon my chest here are spread the perfumed tresses
(Ah, those lock of hair, or a wayward night at the tavern)!

Swaying here intoxicated on the surface of the river
Deeply colored, overcast, the stormy night

Ah, that spring of sleeping, lost, nature!
Ah, that fragrant, intoxicated stormy night!

Then that audacious attraction of the desire of embrace
Ah, that night, that night of union with Salma!

Why should there not be the desire to sacrifice yourself on both Akhtar?
Ah, that event of the night! Ah that eventful night!

IV. Akhtar Shirani's Engagement with Iqbal's Poetry

As discussed in the Introduction Chapter, and presented above in this chapter, Shirani engages with Iqbal's poetry on women by composing poems on topics to which Iqbal was drawn (veiling and women's education), albeit with a different take on those issues. He breaks away from Iqbal's conservative views and supports modern education for girls. Shirani also engages with Iqbal by using similar titles as Iqbal does, but for different purposes. For example, Iqbal's poem, *Shikvah*, is his complaint addressed to God on why He has abandoned Muslims and allowed their community to wane in status. Below are some excerpts from Iqbal's poem:

Shikvah (Iqbal)[292]

kyūṅ zayāṅkār banūṅ sūd farāmosh rahūṅ?
fikar-e-fardā nah karūṅ, mahv-e-ġham-e-dosh rahūṅ
nālē bulbul kē sunūṅ aur hamah tan gosh rahūṅ

[292] Iqbal. *Kulliyat-e-Iqbal*, 135-141.

hamnavā: maiṅ bhī ko'ī gul hūṅ keh ḳhāmosh rahūṅ?

Why should I sustain loss and forfeit profit?
Not worry about tomorrow and simply dwell on the past
Hear the laments of the nightingale and remain all ears
Hamnava: Am I a flower that I should remain quiet?

ṣafḥah-e-dahar sē bāṯil ko miṭāyā ham nē
nau'-e-insāṅ ko ġhulāmī sē chuṛāyā ham nē
tērē ka'bē ko jabīnoṅ sē basāyā ham nē
tērē Qurān ko sīnoṅ sē lagāyā ham nē
phir bhī ham sē yah gilah hai keh vafādār nahīṅ
ham vafādār nahīṅ - tū bhī to dildār nahīṅ

We [Muslims] erased falsehood from the world's surface
We freed mankind from slavery
We spread our brows at your Ka'ba
We embraced your Quran
Even then you have the complaint we are not loyal
If we are not loyal, you also are not the beloved

banī aġhyār kī ab cāhnē valī duniyā
rah ga'ī apnē liyē ēk ḳhālī duniyā
ham to ruḳhṣat hu'ē auroṅ nē saṅbhālī duniyā
phir nah kehnā hu'ī tauḥīd sē ḳhālī duniyā
ham to jītē haiṅ keh duniyā mēṅ tirā nām rahē
kahīṅ mumkin hai keh sāqī nah rahē, jām rahē

The world has become the abode of the others now
For us only a fictional world remains
Others have taken the reigns as we depart from the world stage
Do not say then that the world is devoid of your Oneness
We live so that your name remains in the world
Is it possible that the cupbearer is lost and the cup remains?

In this way Iqbal presents the grievances of the Muslim community to God. It is quite a bold stance to accuse God of complacency and abandonment and demand explanation from Him, especially for someone like Iqbal who privileged Islam and based his philosophy primarily on religion. However, Shirani's poem by the same title is a grievance addressed to a female beloved. Not surprisingly, in the first couplet I quote, the

verb used for the addressee is inflected in the masculine form. Notwithstanding this, we see how it also acts in a neutral way, especially when we consider the next couplet. Shirani accuses his beloved here of giving hope and then abandoning him and forgetting all about him:

Shikvah (Shirani)[293]

mērī ḳhwābīdah ummīdoṅ ko jagāyā kyūṅ thā?
dil jalānā thā to dil tum nē lagāyā kyūṅ thā?

Why did you awaken my dormant desires?
If you meant to break my heart why did you show affection?

mujh ko is ṯaraḥ girānā thā agar naẓaroṅ sē
phir mirē ʻishq ko sīnē mēṅ basāyā kyūṅ thā?

If you wanted to discard me in such a way
Why did you embrace me into your heart?

Nāmah-e-shauq hamēshah jo nah likh saktī thīṅ
"bandagī namah" ʻabaṡ ham sē likhāyā kyūṅ thā?

If you were unable to ever write the book of love
Why did you needlessly have us write a note of servitude?

alġharẓ, ʻishq kā bhūlā huā yah talḳh sabaq
bhūlnē vālī! Mujhē yād dilāyā kyūṅ thā?

In short, this bitter lesson of passion that I had forgotten,
Oh forgetful one! Why did you make me recall?

Conclusion

By giving his beloved a feminine name, but also a real, multi-faceted identity that experiences not only love but also pain, Akhtar Shirani is in effect giving women in general a more real, public, and textured existence. This manner of his poetry contributes

[293] Akhtar Shirani, *Kulliyāt-e-Akhtar Shirani*, 244-46.

to his status as a feminist and progressive poet. He publicized contemporary feminist issues such as *pardah*, arranged marriages, and education, and came down heavily on the side of women's rights.

Shirani used his poetry to tackle many political issues. As several of his poems show here he was not one to simply follow traditional customs. He challenged patriarchy and questioned the norms that subjugated women and put undue burdens upon them. He also addressed political realities and foresaw the deteriorating status of Urdu due to religious politics when he wrote, in essence, an ode to Urdu, praising its virtues and praying for its future. Shirani was the poet of romance who broke away from traditional tropes by giving an unambiguous feminine identity to his beloved. He addressed his beloved by her name and spoke of her romantic desires; by doing so he paved the way for poets to talk more openly about the real love and desires of men and women alike.

Chapter Four: Kaifi Azmi

qadar ab tak tirī tārīḳh nē jānī hī nahīṅ
tujh mēṅ sho'lē bhī haiṅ bas ashk fashānī hī nahīṅ
tū ḥaqīqat bhī hai dilcasp kahānī hī nahīṅ
tērī hastī bhī hai ik cīz javānī hī nahīṅ
apnī tārīḳh kā unvān badalnā hai tujhē
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe[294]

History has not understood your value till now
You also have fire, not just the skills to shed tears
You are reality, not just an interesting story
Your existence is also of value, not just your youth
You have to change the title of your history
Rise my love! You must walk with me

Kaifi Azmi

A fervent socialist and an activist from a very early age, Kaifi Azmi (1919-2002) was always interested in social justice and keen on making a difference through his life's works. He dedicated his skill as a poet to oppose oppressions of various kinds and to address cultural practices that he believed to be outdated and had no place in a progressive and modern nation. In this chapter I look at several poems of Kaifi Azmi that primarily address social issues concerning women in India. Although he uses his poetry to address and challenge many different aspects of society, these poems illustrate his commitment to equality and justice in a highly patriarchal society. Further, the lack of specific religious vocabulary in the poems, especially juxtaposed against the other authors discussed in this study, reflects Azmi's communist principals. As would be

[294] Kaifi Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifī Azmi*, (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 2003), 86.

expected of a life-long communist, his poetry addresses the issues that affect society without dividing the issues along communal lines. He was a proponent of socialist nationalism free from any societal divisions, and saw problems affecting Indians as Indian problems, rather than Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian.

In this chapter I will first give a brief history of the Progressive Writers' Movement, of which Kaifi Azmi was a part, in order to set the context in which we must read his poetry. After introducing his biography, primarily through the autobiography of his wife Shaukat Kaifi, I will discuss the selected poems, which show Azmi's approach to addressing women's rights in India, as well as his resistance to various forms of oppressions.

I. Historical Context

Progressive Writers' Movement

During the First World War, India witnessed a rise in nationalist movements across its political landscape. This nationalist sentiment continued to grow after the war. Marxist thought and Communism influenced many young, middle-class men and women during this period as well. At the same time Urdu literature saw the rise of the genre of the short story, primarily pioneered by the author Munshi Premchand.[295] In 1932, *Angāre*, a groundbreaking sensational collection of ten Urdu short stories was published in Lucknow. Shabana Mahmud who hyperbolically describes this publication as "the first ferocious attack on society in modern Urdu literature" also explains how this book laid

[295] Shabana Mahmud, "Angare and the Founding of Progressive Writers' Association." *Modern Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (1996): 452.

the foundation for the emergence of the Progressive Writers' Movement by initiating "a major change in the form and content of Urdu literature."[296] According to the Progressive Writers, literature had to serve the purpose of making the lives of people better. They shunned the notion of art just for the sake of art.

The All India Progressive Writers' Association was formed in 1934 by a group of young Indian intellectuals who met at a Chinese restaurant in London, to discuss the future of Indian literature. During their meeting they resolved to form the group in order to effect change in society.[297] In the association's manifesto, published in the February 1936 issue of London's *Left Review*, the drafters proclaimed that, "the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today – the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation, so that it may help us to understand these problems and through such understanding help us to act."[298] The association won supporters like Premchand and Rabindranath Tagore, and even Mohammad Iqbal gave the organization his approval.[299] It also attracted many famous names from Urdu poetry; Hasrat Mohani, Josh Malihabadi and Firaq Gorakhpuri all joined in. Others who became members of the association were famous poets and lyricists, such as Sahir Ludhianvi and Kaifi Azmi who had won fame by composing songs for Indian films.[300]

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[296] Mahmud, "Angare," 447.
[297] Raza Mir and Ali Husain Mir, *Anthems of Resistance: A Celebration of Progressive Urdu Poetry*, New Delhi: IndiaInk, (2006), 4.
[298] Mahmud, "Angare," 454.
[299] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 7.
[300] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 7-11.

Though not considered a Marxist, Premchand was chosen to preside over the first All-India Progressive Writer's Movement Conference in Lucknow on April 10, 1936 because of his popularity amongst both Hindi and Urdu writers.[301] Premchand shared the same beliefs with the progressive writers, and had been writing about the plight of peasants and poor people of India well before the creation of PWA.

In his address to the conference Premchand observed that throughout history society had tried to address issues of poverty and inequality through religion. He acknowledged that the disparity between the haves and have-nots was at a level that had never been seen before. He rejected the outdated notion that art had to be for art's sake, and believed that "the artist must rebel against outdated mores of society, devoting all of his energy to economic and political freedom."[302] This rejection of religion as the basis for addressing social ills was in line with the policies of the Soviet Union, which viewed religion as a divisive force and rejected the notion that it could have any positive impact in modern society.

But the organization desired to have a broad appeal and in order to attract writers from all over India it had to become more inclusive. They made changes to the manifesto to make it less socialist and also dropped the demand of common language and script for Indian literature - something the association members had envisioned initially.[303] The

[301] Hafeez Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 4 (1967): 649.
[302] Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement," 651. The British government, among others in Indian society, believed that the association was controlled by communists and its purpose was to serve the interests of the Communist International. The British government, among others in Indian society, believed that the association was controlled by communists and its purpose was to serve the interests of the Communist International.
[303] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 8.

tactics worked, and over time the Progressive Writers' Association (henceforth PWA) became so influential – at least in Urdu literary circles – that those who did not subscribe to its ideals and vision were marginalized.[304]

This unparalleled influence did not last very long however, and the Partition of India in 1947 came as a blow to the movement. It divided the Urdu literary community in two. The formation of Pakistan was anathema to the ideals of the PWA because it divided the people based on religious identities.[305] The progressive writers were not immune to such divisions either. Quite uncharacteristically for many writers, religious identity outweighed their Marxist identity and ideals, and they threw in their support for Partition.[306] The events after Partition further eroded the influence of PWA and its efforts to bring about a socialist order. PWA had challenged imperialism and had fought for the rights of all Indians, but it was disappointed with the nationalist agenda and policies of the nation states of India and Pakistan which did not address the needs of the poor and disadvantaged.[307] The policies of the new nation states were driven by capitalism and were not much different from the imperialist policies of the British.

Division amongst PWA members was one reason for the decline of the movement. Another reason was that even though the progressive writers wrote of the suffering of the peasants and the working class their primary audience had always been the educated middle class. Facing a new political reality, the middle-class bourgeoisie of the independent states sought their "emancipation, not through challenging the system,

[304] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 11.
[305] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 59.
[306] Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement," 651.
[307] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 93.

but by learning to play its game" by becoming part of the new nation state building agenda.[308]

Although the movement declined as the nation states consolidated themselves, the progressive writers' movement had successfully managed to shake the foundations of Urdu poetry. The *ghazal* genre, the pride of Urdu poetry, came under attack by the progressives as being linked to a decadent culture of debauchery, and therefore, not fit for dealing with progressive thought and topics.[309] Furthermore, the ideals that the movement espoused continued to live on in the modern feminist poetry of Pakistan. The feminist poets of Pakistan who challenge the establishment and Islamization in Pakistan are "the true inheritors of the tradition of progressive poetry, its champions, and its trailblazers."[310]

II. Biographical Information

"At a very young age…I started becoming filled with sorrow," writes Kaifi Azmi, in the preface to his anthology.[311] Four of his sisters succumbed to tuberculosis and died while he was fairly young. Kaifi's personal sorrows affirm him to rid the larger world of some of its sorrows.

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[308] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 46.
[309] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 27, write the following about the how the Progressives viewed ghazal genre: "Even the venerable ghazal genre came in for its share of flak and was referred to as a medium of reactionary thought and an instrument that reflected an era of *jagirdaari* and *ayyashi* (feudalism and debauchery)."
[310] Mir and Mir, *Anthems of Resistance*, 203.
[311] Kaifi Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 8.

Azmi was born on January 14, 1919 in Mijwan, a small village in Azamgarh district of the United Provinces.[312] Azmi's family owned farmland and was mainly involved in farming, but since his father did not see a good future for farming in India he moved his family to Lucknow.[313] Azmi was introduced to high Urdu culture from an early age and was accustomed to *mushairas* (poetry recital gatherings) being held at his home regularly. In fact, it was at one of these gatherings that Azmi recited the first *ghazal* he wrote; he was only elven years old at the time.[314]

He was sent to Sultanul Madaras, the most prestigious Shii madrasa of Lucknow. Ironically, it was at this school where Azmi first came across a copy of *Angāre* and was introduced to progressive literature which led him down a path of resistance and away from religion.[315] While literature tied to romance or sexuality was proscribed for students, Kaifi noticed the teachers secretly reading the same literature with gusto. The ethical standards were applied selectively at the madrasa and this to Kaifi displayed the hypocrisy of the religious establishment. It was also at this religious institution the he began writing poetry of protest when the school ordered him to disband a student's association that he and some other boys had formed.[316]

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[312] Shaukat Kaifi, *Kaifi and I: A Memoir*, (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2010), 148. Shaukat Kaifi explains that no one really knew what was Kaifi Azmi's real birthday, but a friend of his, Sukhdev, decided that that will be Kaifi Azmi's birthday.

[313] Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 17. It was in Lucknow that Azmi sought out Maulana Safi and asked him to become his teacher and suggest corrections to his poetry.

[314] Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 16. When many people did not believe that he had actually composed that poem Azmi became upset and told his sister that he will show them all by becoming a renowned poet.

[315] Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 10-11.

[316] Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 12-13. In response to the order of disbandment Azmi organized a strike which lasted two years, at the end of which he and some of his friends were expelled from the religious institution.

The young Azmi had started experimenting with political activism while he lived in Lucknow, however, it was not until he left Lucknow and went to Kanpur that he became a communist.[317] Azmi calls his exposure to communist party's literature in Kanpur, given to him by members of a workers' council, a romantic accident. He writes that the only thing he knows for certain about himself is that he "was born in colonized India, became old in an independent India, and will die in a socialist India."[318]

Azmi's progressive leanings and bold stand against injustice and oppression in all its forms were what his wife Shaukat Kaifi found so attractive about him before they were married.[319] In February 1947, when the Progressive Writer's Conference took place in Hyderabad, Kaifi recited a poem titled *Taj*, at a *mushaira.* This was a poem against the injustice and oppression of monarchy. Shaukat Kaifi was very impressed with Azmi's bravery for reciting such a poem in the Princely State of Hyderabad, where the institutions of British and Indian monarchy were taken seriously.[320] At another *mushaira* during the same conference, Kaifi Azmi recited his poem '*Aurat*, and Shaukat became convinced that she could only marry a man like Azmi, who was progressive in his thinking.[321]

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[317] Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 21-22.
[318] Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 7.
[319] Kaifi, *Kaifi and I*, 64. Azmi's older sister, Wajida Baji, told Shaukat once that Azmi was so sensitive to poverty and injustice even as a child that he would refuse to wear new clothes on Eid since other children of the village could not afford to do so.
[320] Kaifi, *Kaifi and I*, 27).
[321] Kaifi, *Kaifi and I*, 32).
- Kaifi, *Kaifi and I*, 152. Shaukat Kaifi and Kaifi Azmi were married for fifty-five years, from May 23, 1947 to May 10, 2002, the day Azmi died. They had a love-marriage, and even though Shaukat Kaifi was from a conservative Muslim family, she was adamant about marrying for love and refused to have an arranged marriage.

Kaifi Azmi remained true to his progressive ideals and stayed committed to his principals of communism throughout his life. He always carried his Communist Party card with him and even called it his "most precious capital."[322] Although he was culturally a Muslim there is no evidence that he had exclusivist religious leanings.[323]. He addresses issues that affect Indian society as a whole and does not seem to distinguish between issues based on religion. This is evident from the selected poems below in which he does not assign a religious identity to the subjects of his poems. He does, however, point to the hypocrisy of religious leaders as he charges them for acts of oppression.

III. Selected Poetry

As one of Kaifi Azmi's first poems in his first publication, *Jhankār* (Jingle) from 1944, *Widow's Suicide* quite clearly establishes him as a progressive writer who believes that poetry should address social issues, and strive to make society better. Azmi uses the *masnavī* form, a form used for historical and fantastical narrations, in order to tell the story of a widow:

bewah kī khudkushī - Widow's Suicide[324]

yah andhērī rāt yah sārī fiẓā so'ī so'ī
pattī pattī manẕar-e-ḳhāmosh mēṅ kho'ī kho'ī
mauj-e-zan hai behr-e-ẕulmat tīrgī kā josh hai
sham hī sē āj qandīl-e-falak ḳhāmosh hai
cand tārē haiṅ bhī to bēnūr pathrā'ē hū'ē

[322] Kaifi, *Kaifi and I*, 154.
[323] Kaifi, *Kaifi and I*, (2010). Nowhere in her memoir is there any mention of the family being a practicing Muslim family or evidence that Azmi was influenced by religion.
[324] Kaifi Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 35-38.

jēsē bāsī hār mēṅ hoṅ phūl kamhlā'ē hū'ē
khap gayā hai yūṅ ghaṭā mēṅ cāndnī kā ṣāf rang
jis ṯaraḥ māyūsiyōṅ mēṅ dab kē reh jā'ē umang
umḍī hai kālī ghaṭā duniyā ḍubonē kē li'ē
yā calī hai bāl kholē rānḍ ronē kē li'ē
jitnī hī gunjān bastī utnī hī vīrān hai
har galī ḳhāmosh hai har rāstah sunsān hai
ik makāṅ sē bhī makīṅ kī kuch ḳhabar miltī nahīṅ
cilmanēṅ uṭhtī nahīṅ zanjīr-e-dar hiltī nahīṅ
so rahē haiṅ mast-o-bēḳhud ghar kē jul pīr-o-javāṅ
ho ga'ī haiṅ band ḥusn-o-'ishq mēṅ sargoshiyāṅ

This dark night, the whole world asleep
Each and every petal is lost in the view of silence
The sea of oppression is tumultuous, there is a passion of gloom
From the evening onwards today, the lamp of heaven is silent
The few stars that remain are lightless and petrified
As if withered flowers in a stale garland
The clean color of moonlight has been consumed by the clouds
Like passion gets suppressed in disappointments
The black clouds are overcast to drown the world
Or the widow is on her way to cry, with her hair loose
As dense the village is, it is equally desolate
Each street is quiet, each path is silent
The news of the resident cannot be attained from one house
The screen does not lift, the door chain does not move
All the old and young of the house are sleeping, intoxicated and unconscious
The whispers of beauty and passion have been lulled into silence

hāṅ magar ik simt ik goshē mēṅ ko'ī nauhahgar
lē rahī hai karvaṭoṅ par karvaṭēṅ dil thām kar
dil saṅbhaltā hī nahīṅ hai sīnah-e-ṣad cāk mēṅ
phūl sā cehrah aṭa hai bēvagī ḳhāk mēṅ
uṛ calī hai rang-e-ruḳh ban kar ḥayāt-e-musta'ār
ho rahā qalb-e-murdah mēṅ javānī kā fashār
ḥasratēṅ dam toṛtī hēṅ yās kī āġhosh mēṅ
sēkṛoṅ shikvē macaltē haiṅ lab-e-ḳhāmosh mēṅ
'umr āmādah nahīṅ murdah parastī kē li'ē
bār hai yah zindah maiyat dosh-e-hastī kē li'ē
cāhtī hai lakh qābū dil peh pātī hī nahīṅ
hā'ē rē ẕālim javānī bas mēṅ ātī hī nahīṅ
thartharā kar girtī hai jab sūnē bistar par naẕar
lē kē ik karvaṭ paṭak dētī hai voh takiyē peh sar
jab khanak uṭhtī haiṅ sotī laṛkiyoṅ kī cūṛiyāṅ

āh ban kar uṭhnē lagtā hai kalējēh sē dhūāṅ
ho ga'ī bēvah kī ḳhātir nīnd bhī jaisē ḥarām
muḳhtaṣir sā 'ahd-e-vaṣlat dē gayā soz-e-davām
dopehar kī chā'oṅ daur-e-shādmānī ho gayā
piyās bhī bujhnē nah pā'ī ḳhatam pānī ho gayā

Yes, yet, in one direction, in a corner, a lamenter
Is tossing and turning, holding her heart
Heart does not settle in this chest with a hundred cuts
The flower-like face is filled in the dust of widowhood
The color of the face, becoming a borrowed life, is fading away
There is pressure of youth pulsing in the heart of the dead
Desires die in the embrace of despair
Hundreds of lamentations persist on the silent lips
The age is not yet ready for the embrace of death
This corpse is too heavy for the shoulder of existence
She wishes to steady her heart, but is incapable
Alas, this oppressor youth does not come under control
Trembling, when the sight falls upon the empty bed
Taking a turn she throws down her head on a pillow
When the bangles of the sleeping girls jingle
Becoming a sigh, smoke rises from the heart
As if even sleep has become forbidden for the sake of the widow
One brief promise of union gave an eternity of grief
The shade of the afternoon became the age of rejoicing
The water got consumed but the thirst remained unquenchable

lē rahī hai karvatoṅ par karvatēṅ bāiz̲t̲arār
āg mēṅ pārah hai yā bistar peh jism-e-bēqarār
paṛ ga'ī ik āh kar kē ro kē uṭh bēṭhī kabhī
ungliyoṅ mēṅ lē kē zulf ḳham bah ḳham īnṭhī kabhī
ā kē honṭoṅ par kabhī māyūs āhēṅ tham ga'īṅ
aur kabhī sūnī kalā'ī par nigāhēṅ jam ga'īṅ
itnī duniyā mēṅ kahīṅ apnī jagah pātī nahīṅ
yās is ḥad kī keh shauhar kī bhī yād ātī nahīṅ
ā rahē haiṅ yād paiham sās nandoṅ kē sulūk
phaṭ rahā hai ġham sē sīnah uṭh rahī hai dil mēṅ hūk
apnī māṅ behnoṅ kā bhī āṅkhēṅ curānā yād hai
aisī duniyā mēṅ kisī kā choṛ jānā yād hai
baġhbāṅ to qabr mēṅ hai kaun ab dēkhē bahār
ḳhud usī ko tīr us kē karnē vālē haiṅ shikār
jab naz̲ar ātā nahīṅ dētā ko'ī bēkas kā sāth
zehr kī sīshī kī jānib ḳhud baḳhud baṛhtā hai hāth

dil taṛap kar keh rahā hai jald is duniyā ko choṛ
cūṛiyāṅ toṛīṅ to phir zanjīr-e-hastī ko bhi toṛ

She is tossing and turning in agitation
Is it mercury in fire or a restless body on the bed
Dropped down sighing, or got up having cried sometimes
Taking her tresses in her fingers she twisted sometimes
Having come on the lips sometimes the sighs of disappointment stopped
And sometimes the eyes fixated on the bare wrists
In the whole world she cannot find a place for herself
Despair to such an extent that she does not even miss her husband
She is remembering the treatment of the mother and sisters-in-law one after another
The breast is bursting with sorrow, a deep sigh of helplessness is rising
She remembers the turning away of her mother's and sisters' eyes as well
She remembers someone leaving in a world like this
The gardener is in the grave, who would experience spring now
Her own arrows are about to make her their prey
When no one can be seen giving support to the helpless
The hand itself reaches out towards the poison glass
Writhing, the heart says, leave this world soon
If you have broken your bangles, then break the chain of life as well

dam agar nikaltā to kho'ī zindagī mil jā'ē gī
yah nahīṅ to ḳhēr tanhā qabar hī mil jā'ē gī
vāṅ tujhē żillat kī naẕaroṅ sē nah dēkhē gā ko'ī
vāṅ sab ahl-e-dard haiṅ sab ṣāḥab-e-inṣāf haiṅ
rehbar āgē jā cukā rāhēṅ bhī tērī ṣāf haiṅ
dil inhīṅ bātoṅ mēṅ uljhā thā keh dam ghabarā gayā
hāth lē kar zehar kī shīshī laboṅ tak ā gayā
talmalātī āṅkh jhapkātī, jhijhaktī hāṅptī
pī ga'ī kul zehar āḳhir thartharātī kāṅptī
maut nē jahṭkā diyā kul 'uẓū ḍhīlē ho ga'ē
sāṅs ukhṛī, nabẕ dūbī, hoṅṭ nīlē ho ga'ē
āṅkh jhapkī askh ṭapkā hickī ā'ī kho ga'ī
maut kī āġhosh mēṅ ik āh bhar kar so ga'ī
aur kar ik āh sulgē hind kī rasmoṅ kā dām
ai javānā marg bevah tujh ko kaifī kā salām

Once the breath leaves, you will find the life that you lost
If not that, then at least you will find the grave
No one will see you with glances of dishonor there
Whether you want to laugh or cry, no one will stop you
There, all are people of sorrow, all are friends of justice
The guide has gone ahead, your paths are also clear

The heart was so uneasy with these thoughts that she became perplexed
Taking the poison bottle the hand came up to the lips
Restless, blinking her eyes, hesitating, gasping
Shaking and trembling she drank the whole poison finally
Death gave a push, all the limbs fell loose
Breath became undone, pulse sank, the lips became blue
The eye blinked, tear fell, a sob came and went
Heaving a sigh, in the embrace of death, she fell asleep
Heave another sigh—set fire to India's rituals
Oh youthful dead widow, you have Kaifi's *salām*.

Kaifi Azmi takes on the issue of widows in India who receive no support from their families, are made to feel like a burden, and are often pushed into conditions where they feel the need to commit suicide. As he writes in the poem, the widow constantly remembers the treatment she has received at the hands of her mother-in-law and her sisters-in-law. In fact even her own mother and sisters forsake her. The widow becomes such a burden to the family that Azmi describes her as a "living corpse" even though she is a young woman, of an "age not yet ready for the embrace of death." However, after losing her only benefactor and protector she does not have many options left, and in fact it may be expected of her that she end her own life.

One of the things this poem does well is make the reader feel the inner turmoil of the widow. She is restless, while others in the house are fast asleep. She tosses and turns, then rises, and throws herself back on the pillow. She nervously twists her hair and walks about, while those around her remain oblivious to her state of anxiety and despair. She is shut out from the experience of spring, and life. So the only recourse available to her is to end her own life and follow "the gardener," her benefactor, to the grave. After all, her "guide has gone ahead" and has cleared the path for her in order to follow him. If she

ends her life she would have the peace that she could not access in life even during her marriage. In death, she will be in a place where no one will treat her with dishonor. She will find justice among people who understand her sorrow; the sorrow associated with being a helpless woman and a widow. This is the sorrow that comes with not having an identity of her own; her only reason for living had been her husband.

Finally, at the end, Azmi walks the reader through the final moments as this young widow puts poison to her lips. She is shaking, trembling, gasping, and panting, but she finally drinks the poison that is her only salvation. By using graphic imagery like "all the limbs fell loose" and describing how her lips turn blue after the last breath escapes her body, Azmi wants to elicit an emotional response from the reader that is so profound that they personally feel the anguish of the woman ending her own life. Only by creating a feeling of empathy toward women in the widow's situation can Azmi hope to change the views of society.

As is evident in many of their writings, Indian widows have felt "trapped"[325] and powerless. The widows, having no economic security, have often been forced into performing menial labor for her in-law's family in order to earn their upkeep. Even while performing daily labor for the family they have been made to feel worthless and made to feel like a burden on the family's resources.[326] Widows have often been the target of ridicule, were denied adequate nutrition, and denied all privacy in order to make sure they

[325] Uma Chakravarti, "Social Pariahs and Domestic Drudges: Widowhood among Nineteenth Century Poona Brahmins," *Social Scientist* 21 (1993): 131. Chakravarti uses the upper-caste Brahmin widows as the subjects of her study. Even the poor families in upper-castes are inclined to feel like they are obligated to follow the strict customs that are expected from their caste.
[326] Chakravarti, "Social Pariahs," 133.

were chaste.[327] At the house of the in-laws the widows have had the lowest status. And the general idea amongst many family members has been that the widow was the cause of misfortune and death in the family.[328]

According to the Brahmanical code, the widow ceases to be a person once she becomes a widow since her union with her husband was what made her a whole person. This person who was once whole through marriage becomes socially and sexually dead after the husband's passing, while remaining physically alive.[329] The Brahmanical patriarchy institutionalized the widow's marginalized state since she loses her role of reproduction. In the upper castes the woman only mates with one person and her value lies in reproduction. Once she loses that reproductive value she becomes dead to the society.[330] Control over property is another reason for the institutional marginalization of widows. Family members can deny them any share in inheritance since their low status, akin to a servant, is institutionally sanctioned.[331]

Although the nature of widowhood is quite brutal in the upper castes, the lives of widows amongst lower castes can be much different. Part of the reason for the relatively better treatment of lower-caste widows is due to their status as wage earners.[332] Thus,

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[327] Chakravarti, "Social Pariahs," 131.
[328] Chakravarti, "Social Pariahs," 134.
[329] Uma Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste, and Labor: Ideological and Material Structure of Widwohood." *Economic and Political Weekly* 30, no. 36 (1995): 2248.
[330] Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste, and Labor," 2249.
- Chakravarti, "Social Pariahs," 138. The widow's chastity was a concern for the family and in order to reduce her sexual drive she was given less food or made to fast. Eating cooling foods and sleeping on the floor were other measures that were forced upon the widows.
[331] Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste, and Labor," 2254.
- Chakravarti, "Social Pariahs," 132. The lower status of women and what they are entitled to is not just a social construct but it is also sanctioned in Brahmanical spirituality.
[332] Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste, and Labor," 2254. Pauline Kolenda compares widowhood in North India between high-caste Rajputs and low-caste Chuhras.

economic reasons once again play a part in how the widow is treated, but in the case of lower castes the earning potential of the widow grants her somewhat better status. This difference in status of lower-caste women, like the Chuhras of North India, meant that they could even remarry and were not resigned to life-long widowhood.[333]

The rules of remarriage are different between the high-caste Hindus and low-caste Hindus because the high-caste widows were expected to live a life of virtue and asceticism. However, since the low-caste Hindus could not lead a religiously virtuous life due to their lower level in the social order, remarriage did not pose any spiritual or religious concerns.[334] The issue of widow remarriage is not only an important issue because it concerns the woman, but it is also of importance when it comes to population and demographics. If younger widows cannot remarry it takes women of childbearing age out of the reproduction equation.[335]

The issue of remarriage is comparable in the Muslim community. Although Muslim women are permitted remarriage by Islamic law, in practice the numbers show a very different reality. According to the Muslim Women's Survey conducted in 2000 a very low percentage of 2.85 of the poorest women reported a second marriage in the country as a whole. The numbers were highest in rural India, both north and south, at 4.26 and 4.69 respectively.[336] Divorce, which is also permissible to Muslim women, nonetheless comes with its social stigma. A survey conducted by the Women's Research

[333] Chakravarti, "Gender, Caste, and Labor," 2254.
[334] S. N. Agarwala, "Widow Remarriages in Some Rural Areas of Northern India," *Demography* 4, no. 1 (1967): 127.
[335] Agarwala, "Widow Remarriages," 127.
[336] Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon, *Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 82. Muslim Women's Survey of 2000 had 9,541 Muslim and Hindu women respondents.

and Action Group from 1993-95 showed that a very small number of women, about 5 percent, reported getting divorced. However, the number may have been higher and some women may not have reported being divorced due to the stigma attached to it.[337] These findings would suggest that regardless of the legal rights of remarriage and divorce Muslim women in India are in a position not very different from their Hindu counterparts at each level of the socio-economic and educational ladder.

Caste or caste-like rigid social divisions exist in the Muslim community in South Asia as well. Although there is no sanction for a caste system in Islam, in practice Muslim communities have caste-like divisions in India. These divisions generally follow the same patterns as caste, because they are also based on occupations. In fact the early Muslims in Northern India had divisions based on occupational rankings of spiritual guardians, nobility, and the commoners. Over time, these rankings became more rigid and the Muslims in India took on the practices of the more numerous Hindus through the process of acculturation.[338] These social divisions come with their own rules regarding marriage and divorce and many other practices, which are not so different from those practiced by Hindus of various castes.

When it comes to the treatment of widows, at the extreme is the practice of *sati* (widow immolation). *Sati* was practiced in India for many centuries until the British colonial government abolished it in 1829.[339] The widows were coerced into immolation primarily for the material gain of surviving relatives of the deceased. Brahman priests had

[337] Hasan and Menon, *Unequal Citizens*, 83.
[338] Shamim S. Ahmad, and A.K. Chakravarti, "Some Regional Characteristics of Muslim Caste System in India," *GeoJournal* 5, no. 1 (1981): 55-60.
[339] Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 122. However, the abolishment of the practice does not mean the practice stopped, it just became illegal.

a financial stake in the tradition as well, and they frequently pressured widows into immolating themselves on the husband's pyre because they wanted to collect their fees for officiating the ritual.[340]

When it came to the economic wellbeing of women during widowhood the Muslim women did not fare too much better than their Hindu counterparts. The laws of inheritance, as practiced in India, were such that a Sunni Muslim woman had little chance of inheriting any property left to her by her husband, unless other heirs in the will agreed that she get her share. Shia Muslim women in this regard were in a better position because they could inherit at least a third of the deceased husband's property through his will.[341] Looking at remarriages in rural North India Agarwala informs that the trend showed that Muslim widows of reproductive age were more likely to get remarried since their religion did not pose any restriction on remarriage.[342] Widows that were beyond the age of reproduction were less likely to remarry. It is not clear whether they chose not to remarry or that men did not want to marry a woman who could not bear any heirs. The latter is very likely given how women's value has been linked to their capacity to produce heirs.

The primary motives behind the treatment of the widow are clearly driven by concern for preserving the patriarchal norm, and controlling the woman and her body.

[340] Mani, "Contentious Traditions," 125.
[341] J.N. Saxena, "Widow's Right of Succession in India," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 11, no. 4 (1962): 577.
[342] Agarwala, "Widow Remarriages," 131. Thirty to thirty-Seven percent of Muslim women were documented to have remarried in this study. The percentage of remarriages among lower-caste Hindu women ranged from eighteen to thirty-two percent.
- Alka Ranjan, "Determinants of Well-Being Among Widows: An Exploratory Study in Varanasi," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 43 (2001): 4090. Ranjan's more recent study showed that the percentages of widow remarriage among lower-caste Hindus was sixty to seventy percent in Northern and Central India, and even higher in Southern India.

The means by which this control has often been established is by denying the woman financially so that she would remain at the mercy of others. We see these points discussed above in Azmi's poem when he writes that the widow is a "living corpse…a burden." She does not have a life beyond her husband. The woman's identity is incomplete on her own and she only becomes whole through joining with the man in matrimony. Azmi calls the husband the gardener, or the caretaker of the woman, the one who plants the seed in her, and that the woman will never see spring again. Once her caretaker is gone she generally has no one to tend to her and she is left to a life of despair. Since the woman's reproductive life ends with her husband's death she loses her value as someone who can provide an heir as well. Once her benefactor is gone the widow becomes a burden on the family and society, having no other value left to her. Her state of despair is such that suicide becomes an attractive option. Only death can provide her the release she needs to end her suffering.

The next poem is a good example of both romance and resistance in Urdu poetry. Although the message of the poem is clearly equality and empowerment of women there is also affection in the choice of words that Azmi uses. In fact the opening line of the poem establishes both elements from the very start. Azmi addresses the subject of the poem, the woman, as "my love" while telling her to rise and walk alongside him:

'aurat - Woman[343]

uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

[343] Kaifi Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 85-87.

qalb-e-māhol mēṅ larzāṅ sharar-e-jang haiṅ āj
ḥauṣlē vaqt kē aur zīst kē yak rang haiṅ āj
ābgīnoṅ mēṅ tapāṅ valvalah-e-sang haiṅ āj
ḥusn aur ishq ham āvāz-o-ham āhang haiṅ āj
jis mēṅ jaltā hūṅ maiṅ usī āg mēṅ jalnā hai tujhe
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

In the abode of the heart there are trembling sparks of war today
The courage of time and life are of one color today
In the goblets is the agitation of stone's fervor today
Beauty and love are one voice and one melody today
In the fire that I burn you have to burn in that very fire
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

tērē qadmoṅ mēṅ hai firdaus-e-tamaddun kī bahār
tērī naẕroṅ peh hai tehżib-o-taraqqī kā madār
tērī āġhosh hai gehvārah-e-nafs-o-kirdār
tābah kē gird tirē vehm-o-ta'yun kā hiṣār
kavand kar majlis-e-ḳhalvat sē nikalnā hai tujhē
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

Under your feet is the spring of paradise of civilization
The weight of culture and progress rests on your glances
Your lap is the cradle of psyche and character
How many fortresses of vision and determination are around you
You have to come out of the gathering of seclusion like a flash
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

tū keh bējān khilonoṅ sē behal jātī hai
taptī sāṅsoṅ kī ḥarārat sē pighal jātī hai
pā'oṅ jis rāh mēṅ rakhtī hai phisal jātī hai
bankē sīmāb har ik ẕaraf mēṅ ḍhal jātī hai
zīst kē āhnī sāṅcē mēṅ bhī ḍhalnā hai tujhē
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

You are amused by lifeless toys
You melt with the warmth of hot breaths
You slip on whichever path you set foot
You get molded into every vessel having become mercury
You have to set in the iron mold of life too
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

zindagī jehad mēṅ hai ṣabar kē qābū mēṅ nahīṅ
nabẕ-e-hastī kā lahū kāṅptē āṅsūṅ mēṅ nahīṅ

uṛnē khulnē mēṅ hai nakhat-e-ḳham-e-gēsū mēṅ nahīṅ
jannat ik aur hai jo mard kē pehlū mēṅ nahīṅ
us kī āzād ravish par bhī macalnā hai tujhē
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

Life is in effort, not in the control of patience
The blood of life's pulse is not in the trembling tear
It is in flying and blossoming, not in the fragrance of curled tresses
There is another paradise that is not in the understanding of men
You have to roll on its free avenue too
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

goshē goshē mēṅ sulagtī hai citā tērē li'ē
farẓ kā bhēs badaltī hai qaẓā tērē li'ē
qehar hai tērī har ik narm adā tērē li'ē
zehar hī zehar hai duniyā kī havā tērē li'ē
rut badal ḍāl agar phūlnā phalnā hai tujhē
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

In every corner the pyre kindles for you
Fate changes the face of obligation for you
Each soft mannerism of yours is a curse for you
The air of the world is very poisonous for you
Change the season if you want to flourish and grow
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

qadar ab tak tirī tārīḳh nē jānī hī nahīṅ
tujh mēṅ sho'lē bhī haiṅ bas ashk fashānī hī nahīṅ
tū ḥaqīqat bhī hai dilcasp kahānī hī nahīṅ
tērī hastī bhī hai ik cīz javānī hī nahīṅ
apnī tārīḳh kā unvān badalnā hai tujhē
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

History has not understood your value till now
There is fire in you too not just shedding of tears
You are reality too, not just an interesting story
Your existence is also of importance not just your youth
You have to change the title of your history
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

toṛ kar rasm kā but band-e-qadāmat sē nikal
ẓa'af-e-'ishrat sē nikal vahm-e-nazākat sē nikal
nafs kē khīncē hū'ē ḥalqah-e-'aẕmat sē nikal
rāh kā ḳhār hī nahīṅ gul bhī kucalnā hai tujhē

uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

Breaking the idol of tradition break out of imprisonment of customs
Leave weakness of pleasures, come out of superstition of delicacy
Get out of the circle of magnificence drawn by the mind
If love becomes a prison then shun that love
What is the thorn of the road, you have to trample the flower too
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

toṛ yah ‘azm-e-shikan daġhdaġhah-e-pand bhī toṛ
tērī ḳhātir hai jo zanjīr voh saugand bhī toṛ
ṯauq yah bhī hai “zamurd kā gulūband” bhī toṛ
toṛ pēmānah-e-mardān-ē-ḳhird bhī toṛ
bankē ṯūfān chilaknā hai ubalnā hai tujhē
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

Break this wrinkle in resolve, break the counsel of fear too
The oath that is a chain for you, break that too
This as well is an iron collar, break this emerald necklace too
Break the cup of men of intellect too
Having become a storm you have to boil and spill
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

tū falāṯūn-o-arastū hai tū zehrā parvīṅ
tērē qabẓeh mēṅ hai gardūṅ tirī ṭhokar mēṅ zamīṅ
hāṅ uṭhā jald uṭhā pā’ē muqaddar sē jabīṅ
maiṅ bhī ruknē kā nahīṅ vaqt bhī ruknē kā nahīṅ
laṛkhaṛā’ē gī kahāṅ tak keh saṅbhalnā hai tujhē
uṭh mērī jān! mirē sāth hī calnā hai tujhe

You are Plato and Aristotle, you are like luminous stars Zohra Parveen
In your grasp are the heavens, under your step the earth
Yes, lift it, quickly lift your brow from the foot of fate
I won’t be stopping, and time won’t wait either
How long will you stumble, you have to recover
Rise my love! You must walk alongside me

In the first stanza the poet suggests that the time has come for action on the issue of women’s equality and that women must stand up and wage war on the unjust society that keeps them oppressed. He acknowledges that she must have the same passions and dreams and that she must burn in the same fire that he does. The poet realizes that women

have the same dreams and passions because he does not think that women are any different from men, or inferior to men in any way. Women too want to realize their full potential and do not just want to find their identity through their association with men.

In the second stanza he goes on to list some of her capabilities and how paradise and civilization are under her feet, and that culture and progress are through her vision. He suggests that men are not the only producers of culture and everything that we value in this world; women contribute just as much and have just as much to offer. Whatever good there is in the world, is also because of the contributions of women. The poet tells the woman that she must hurry "like a flash" and come out of the closet and take her place on the world stage.

However, in the next two stanzas the poet also lists some of the woman's weaknesses, the main one being that she molds herself into the expectations of the others too readily. He tells her that she has to find her own identity, one that is strong and independent. The woman needs to cast herself in an iron mold in order to fulfill her destiny. The poet lists some of the characteristics that women display, which he considers flawed; such as trembling and crying, and how she pays attention to the fragrance of her curled tresses. He reminds her that there is more to life than vanity and only being concerned about appearances, and that the meaning of life is not found in such things. The true meaning of life lies in effort and action, in flying and blossoming. She must aim high and soar in order to make her life worthwhile. The woman should not be consumed or even distracted by trivial matters like her appearance and her fragrance. He believes

that women engage in these things for the pleasure of men, so that men may find women more attractive and pleasing.

He goes on next to acknowledge that she has many challenges and that the world is a hostile place for her; as if there was a pyre burning for her in every corner. Her kindness and soft mannerisms become a curse for her and people take advantage of her because of her kind nature. However, it is up to her to change the conditions for herself so that she can find opportunities to flourish and grow. Azmi further acknowledges the sad state throughout history and how the woman has been disregarded. Her value has not been understood till now but it is finally time to show the world what she is worth. Or perhaps the world does recognize what she is capable of and men keep her in a state of deprivation so that she does not challenge the status quo. She is more than her tears and softness; she can be strong and be the master of her own destiny, someone who writes her own story.

The old customs and traditions that have been holding her back all this time need to be broken. The woman needs to shun this life of pleasure and weakness and even break bonds of love, if that love holds her back and stifles her growth. Perhaps referring to a woman's state in matrimony, he advises that she is better off alone if marriage becomes the cause of her stagnation, and she must break such bonds. Azmi advises her to break association with those that give her poor counsel, and make her afraid, or try to break her resolve. She has been unwittingly kept in servitude for too long and she must break an emerald necklace too if it symbolizes her subordination to anyone. She should not put herself in a situation where her compliance can be bought off with material things like

jewelry. It is time for her to become a storm and unleash all her force in order to free herself from the prison society has created for her. Azmi ends the poem by praising the woman's wisdom and potential, comparing her to Plato and Aristotle, and the stars Zohra Parveen. He takes on the role of all men in this stanza when he says that neither he nor time will wait for her, and that she must stop stumbling around. The woman will be left behind because no one else will advocate for her, and she must stand up for herself and become her own advocate.

Azmi clearly feels passionate about women's equality. He acknowledges the world has dealt women a bad hand; that men have always denied women the privileges that they themselves have. He realizes that women have been at a disadvantage throughout history and in every society, but he also points out how women themselves are allowing men to keep them oppressed. He admonishes them for their vanity and weaknesses, and encourages them to take charge of their own emancipation, because no one else will help them.

According to Karen Leonard (1979), if we trace the causes of inequality between men and women in India, it would lead us in part to the economic and spiritual ideology related to the caste system. The society was ordered on a spiritual hierarchy, and within the social order men held all the power and made the rules. After India's independence in 1947 all citizens were guaranteed equal status under the constitution, which promised a revolutionary change for women in India.[344] However, the patriarchal system in India

[344] Karen Leonard, "Women in India: Some Recent Perspectives." *Pacific Affairs* 52, no. 1 (Spring, 1979): 95.
- Asha Jayant and Indira Rothermund, "Women, Emancipation and Equality." *Economic and Political Weekly* 24, no. 30 (1989): 1722-1723. Jayand and Rothermund provide a counter argument in which they

ensures unequal status of women in society despite their constitutional rights. In such a patriarchal society women are treated as mere objects.[345] Azmi understands the nature of his society to be as such when he says that the world has never understood the value of women. The patriarchal order of societies all over, and in India too, has denied women their rightful place by denying them opportunities. His poetry exudes passion for justice for women and he wants women to display the same passion in their fight for equality. He wants women to unite and start a movement for equality the likes of which the world has never seen before.

Women's rights movements began in India in the nineteenth-century. Kiran Saxena writes that the first phase of women's movement in India was launched not by women but by men who wanted to work for social reform. These men understood that Indian society could not progress and develop unless the condition of women was improved. Thus it became imperative in their mind that issues faced by Indian women be addressed without delay. Some of the forerunners in this movement were reformers like, Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar. As discussed previously the issues that these reformers were interested in, and sought to change, were those of *sati* (widow immolation), *pardah* (veiling), and child marriage. They also supported causes such as women's education and the right of widows to remarry.[346] Also as mentioned earlier, the early reformers simply wanted to make

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state that the original Brahmanical texts like the *Rig Veda* put women in the highest place and that any lower status of women that is read into these texts is a later reinterpretation of the texts.

[345] Kiran Saxena, "Empowerment of Women: The Indian Context." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 4 (1994): 391.

[346] Saxena, "Empowerment of Women," 394.

conditions for women's domestic lives better and were not interested in granting women equal rights.

The nationalists led the second phase of women's movement in India. This phase was defined by the inclusion of women into the struggle for independence, and several women's organization started during the early twentieth-century.[347] For the first time women's organizations were run by women. However, the women who led these organizations were from a certain class and did not necessarily understand the concerns of the lower-class women they also meant to represent. They opened schools and widow shelters to help women, but these facilities were not accessible to women of lower castes or the rural poor.[348]

The third phase of women's movement in India came about after independence and was characterized by the politicization of these movements. With universal franchise, women became a voting bloc, and several political parties established their own women's wings in order to attract women voters.[349] The primary beneficiaries of constitutional guarantees and five-year plans that the new government introduced to improve women's conditions were mainly upper and middle-class women. These were the women who could access services like education and healthcare, because they had the means to avail these opportunities by either proximity or luxury of extra time and spare income. Women from upper and middle-class society who got involved in promotion of women's equality mostly focused on charitable and welfare work. Although they wanted to help women

[347] Saxena, "Empowerment of Women," 394-95. All India Muslims Women's Conference (Anjuman-e Khawatin-e Islam); Women India Association (1917); the National Council of Women of India (1925); All India Women's Conference (1926).
[348] Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 71-72.
[349] Saxena, "Empowerment of Women," 395.

from all classes they did not do much in the way of empowering poor women. Women from the lower classes and rural areas needed training in order to gain new skills, and that is where many of the women's organizations during this phase failed to deliver.[350]

The International Women's Year in 1975 set the stage for the fourth phase of women's movement in India. During this phase women were not simply associated with men in a political struggle, nor were their organizations mere political wings of national political parties. Women established several autonomous organizations, which were not political in nature. There was also an emergence of voluntary groups whose main focus was to empower women economically and socially.[351] Finally there were women's organizations that sought to understand the issues of poor and rural women so that they could implement programs to address their needs too.

This shift in the dynamics of how women should work to empower all women came on the heels of *Towards Equality*, a report published in 1974. The ministry of Education and Social Welfare appointed a committee in 1971 to ascertain whether the government's constitutional, legal, and administrative initiatives had improved the lives of women since independence in 1947. The committee commissioned numerous studies and interviewed hundreds of women from each state, and by 1973 it had concluded that

[350] Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 225. In 1954, Vibhla Farooqui and her colleagues founded National Federation of Indian Women because they did not agree with women's organizations only engaging in charity work. Through this organization these women aimed to affect all spheres of women's lives and improve their standard of living.

[351] Saxena, "Empowerment of Women," 395-96. Some non-political organizations included: Saheli, Kali for Women, the Forum Against Women's Oppression, and Women's Centre. Some smaller groups that worked voluntarily included: Self-Employed Women's Association, Working Women's Forum, and Annapurna Mahila Mandal.

the status of women in India had actually declined since independence.[352] Despite the constitutional rights and several development plans the Indian government had failed to address the needs of women adequately.

Another point of view explains the cause of current gender inequality in India by looking not at patriarchy directly, but at economics. *Towards Equality* concluded that fewer opportunities and low economic status of women were due to the fact that women's labor was considered supplemental to the household income. Furthermore, as industrialization started taking place women were sidelined even more because they neither had the education, nor the skills, to compete for jobs dealing with industrial technology. The report stated that the "opposition to increasing opportunities for women's participation in economic activities springs…from a conservative view regarding women's 'proper' role in society.[353] This *proper* role of women in society, as we have seen earlier, was thought to be of a wife and a mother. The woman's value was derived not from her potential for productivity in the economic sector, but from her association with a man, and her caregiver status as a mother.

More than half a century after Azmi wrote his poem women are still struggling in India, but now due to globalization. India joined the global economy under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1991. This is when Indian markets opened up to Multinational Corporations (MNCs). The result of this new economic policy was devastating to women. Before globalization and influx of foreign capital, Indian economy

[352] Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 227.
[353] Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 239. Forbes explains that even though women have lost out in the industrial sector, many women have also made gains in service professions. However, statistically the impact of fewer opportunities in the industrial sector is quite significant.

depended heavily on agriculture. The government had frequently pushed for policies of development in order to support the agricultural sector. However, as MNCs moved in, the nature of Indian economy changed and many development programs suffered. Women became an easy source of cheap labor and were exploited in the new economic environment.[354] Once again we see Azmi's words ring true, that the world has not understood the value of women. They were (and are) seen as a source of cheap labor, even though they have potential for contributing so much more to society.

With increased globalization and devaluation of the Indian currency, the government made more cuts in social development programs. As always, women's programs suffered the most; in fact women's education is one of the most neglected issues in India. Failure to educate women keeps them in the unskilled labor market where they can be exploited as cheap and disposable labor. Furthermore, due to the demands of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the IMF the Indian government has cut programs that address women's healthcare as well. These government policies hurt minority and lower-caste women even more because of their marginal status in society that already affords them much fewer opportunities.[355]

The following is another poem in which Kaifi Azmi uses both the aesthetics of love and romance coupled with the call for the woman to be strong. This time he wants women to be strong by being unashamed of something as pure as their love and desire:

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[354] Catherine Argiropoulos and Indhu Rajagopal, "Women in Poverty: Canada and India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 7 (2003): 612-13.
- Kumaresh Chakravarty, "Employment, Incomes and Equality," *Social Scientist* 4. no. 4/5 (1975): 108. Around 1970 and 1971, seventy percent of the Indian workforce was in agriculture and eighty percent of women worked in the agriculture sector.

[355] Argiropoulos and Rajagopal "Women in Poverty," 613-14.

Ifḳhā-e-muhabbat - Concealment of Love[356]

tum muhabbat ko chupātī kyūṅ ho?

Why do you conceal your love?

hā'ēṅ! yah jabar kī ṣūrat jīnā
mūṅh bigāṛē hū'ē amrit pīnā
kāṅptī rūḥ dhaṛaktā sīnā
jurm fiṯrat ko banātī kyūṅ ho?
tum muhabbat ko chupātī kyūṅ ho?

Sigh! To live under such compulsion
Drinking ambrosia with a fowl face
Trembling soul, beating chest
Why do you make something natural a crime?
Why do you conceal your love?

dil bhī hai dil mēṅ tamannā bhī hai
kuch javānī kā taqāẓā bhī hai
tum ko apnē par bharosā bhī hai
jhēṅp kar āṅkh milātī kyūṅ ho?
tum muhabbat ko chupātī kyūṅ ho?

You have a heart, and there is desire in it too
There is some urgency of youth as well
You have faith in yourself too
Why do your eyes meet feeling ashamed?
Why do you conceal your love?

hāṅ voh haṅstē haiṅ jo insān nahīṅ
jin ko kuch 'ishq kā 'irfān nahīṅ
sangzādoṅ mēṅ żarā jān nahīṅ
āṅkh aisoṅ kī bacātī kyūṅ ho?
tum muhabbat ko chupātī kyūṅ ho?

Yes, they laugh, those who are not human
Those who have no knowledge of love
Those offspring of stones do not have any fortitude
Why do you hide from such people?
Why do you conceal your love?

[356] Kaifi Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 93-94.

ẕulm tum nē ko'ī ḍhāyā to nahīṅ
ibn-e-ādam ko satāyā to nahīṅ
ḳhūṅ ġharīboṅ kā bahāyā to nahīṅ
yūṅ pasīnē mēṅ nahātī kyūṅ ho?
tum muhabbat ko chupātī kyūṅ ho?

You have not committed an atrocity
You have not vexed humanity after all
You have not shed the blood of the destitute
Why do stay drenched in sweat then?
Why do you conceal your love?

jhēṅptē to nahīṅ mandar kē makīṅ
jhēṅptē to nahīṅ meḥrāb nashīṅ
jhūṭ par un kī camaktī hai jabīṅ
sac peh tum par sar jhukātī kyūṅ ho?
tum muhabbat ko chupātī kyūṅ ho?

The inhabitants of temples are not bashful
Those facing the mosque niche are not shy
Their shining brows are a lie
Why then do you then bow your honest head?
Why do you conceal your love?

pardah hai dāġh chupānē kē li'ē
sharam hai kiżb peh chānē kē li'ē
'ishq ik gīt hai gānē kē li'ē
is ko hontoṅ mēṅ dabātī kyūṅ ho?
tum muhabbat ko chupātī kyūṅ ho?

Veil is to cover a stain
Shame is to spread over lying
Love is a song that needs to be sung
Why do you press it between your lips?
Why do you conceal your love?

ā'ō ab ghaṭnē kī furṣat hī nahīṅ
aur bhī kām haiṅ ulfat hī nahīṅ
hai yah ḳhāmī bhī nadāmat hī nahīṅ
ḍar kē cilman ko uṭhātī kyūṅ ho?
tum muhabbat ko chupātī kyūṅ ho?

Come, there no leisure for dwindling
There is more to do, not just intimacy

This is a regret also, not just repentance
Why do you raise the screen in fear?
Why do you conceal your love?

This poem is a commentary on the double standard that exists in the South Asian community even to this day. Although men have some luxury to talk about their romantic and sexual desires without having their character questioned, women do not have the same luxury. Women have to keep their love and any sexual desires a secret due to fear of being labeled immoral.

Even though Azmi asks the woman in the poem why she must conceal her love, and suppress that part of her life, his words can be read as directed towards the society that creates the conditions in which women cannot love freely. He asks the woman why she acts as though something as natural as love was a crime? However, it is not *she* who has made love tantamount to a criminal offense for herself. It is the society that she is a part of that has made love so difficult for her that she feels it is something unnatural, and something of which she must be ashamed.

He goes on to reassure her that those who laugh or point fingers at her are the ones who have no knowledge of love. That she should not hide her love out of concern for these people, for they have hearts of stone and cannot understand love. He reminds her that it is not as though she has committed an act of oppression, or shed the blood of the poor. By doing this Azmi is setting her apart from the people who admonish her love. These people who make it *immoral* for women to love openly are the ones that are committing acts of oppression in society, and denying rights to the poor, minorities, and women alike.

Azmi attacks the protectors of "morality" in India - the religious people of the temples and the mosques. By using the examples of both people of the temple and the mosque Azmi implies that both the Hindu and Muslim communities in India have the same view when it comes to how they treat their women. Both communities have oppressive and double standards where women are concerned. Since religions are generally patriarchal, in which men set the rules of morality, women are naturally at the losing end of these societal rules.

Women in South Asia, and in South Asian communities elsewhere often bear the burden of preserving their family's honor by veiling, or living by a code that applies standards of morality differently upon men and women.[357] Azmi accuses these religious people of hypocrisy and living a life of lies while acting sanctimonious the whole time. If these people are not ashamed of their behavior and how they commit so many atrocities, like stealing from the poor, or abusing women, then why should the woman have to be ashamed of something as honest as her expression of love? Love, he reminds her, is a song that needs to be sung. Love is not something that deserves to be hidden behind screens and closed doors. It is something that she should profess openly and not bite her tongue anymore. She should not waste any more time in following the rules of the corrupt society. She needs to stop being afraid and stop being ashamed of love and loving.

Indian women have not had much agency when it comes to love and romance throughout history. However, during the time of nationalist struggle, when the woman's

[357] See Partha Chaterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. for more on the inner and outer domain and how the burden of preserving the family and national honor gets put on Indian women during the colonial rule.

body became a symbol for the family and community's honor, things must have become even more restrictive and burdensome for women. Love-marriage at this time would have likely meant estrangement from the family in general, but especially if the marriage happened to be inter-caste or inter-religion. The passage of the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 changed the nature of such weddings legally, which meant that a couple did not have to identify their caste anymore, making it easier for inter-caste couples to elope.[358] However, acceptance in society was still another matter. Love for women in Indian society is hard enough because it is socially unacceptable for them to act out on their desires; things become even more challenging when one adds the taboo nature of inter-caste couples falling in love.

By the 1970s, with women going to college in larger numbers than ever before, there was a significant increase in the trend towards love-marriage. Although most parents in a study conducted in West Bengal admitted that they would be disappointed with a love-marriage situation, they still seemed to be more open to the idea. Parents who sent their daughters to college seemed to be more open minded about breaking from the tradition of arranged marriages. Other factors making love-marriages easier are the fact that both men and women who are educated have the means to set up a separate household and are not dependent on their parents. Society is also becoming slightly more accepting of love-marriages as people generally become more affluent and educated.[359]

[358] Lauren A. Corwin, "Caste, Class, and the Love-Marriage: Social Change in India." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 39, no. 4 (1977): 827.
[359] Corwin, "Caste, Class, and the Love-Marriage." 828-29.

The case of inter-faith and same-sex marriages however, is not the same. Since Kaifi's time, to the present day, inter-faith marriage has not been readily accepted, especially between Hindus and Muslims. Starting in the 1920s the Hindu right started organizing scare campaigns that suggested that Muslim men were seducing and even abducting Hindu women in order to marry and convert them.[360] If a Hindu woman marries a Muslim man whom she loves her family and the community assume that she was a target of seduction by the man so that Muslims can increase their numbers. It is a cause of shame for the community if the woman decides on the inter-faith marriage of her own volition, and out of love for a man of another faith.[361]

More recently, in 2009, the Hindu right started claiming that Muslim men were conducting a "Love Jihad." This jihad, they explained, was an international conspiracy to convert and marry Hindu women in order to increase Muslim numbers through reproduction from such unions, while at the same time depriving Hindu men access to Hindu wombs.[362] The opposition to Hindu-Muslim union hence has become part of the larger international discourse in which the Muslim man is an agent of an international organization conducting a jihad against non-Muslims. The fact that Hindu women may be "using instruments of conversion and elopement as a mode of coping with, challenging, and…transgressing an oppressive social order" is something that the Hindu right does not

[360] Charu Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men: Love Jihad and Conversions," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 51 (2009): 13-14.
[361] Kaifi, *Kaifi and I*, 127. Azmi's son, Baba, fell in love with a Hindu woman named Tanvi Kher. Her parents did not approve of the match because he was a Muslim and refused to participate in the wedding. However, over time Tanvi's parents did accept Baba and formed a close relationship with him.
[362] Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men," 14.

seem willing to admit.[363] One can safely assume that the motives behind such rhetoric and movements are mainly political. However, the fact that people can be mobilized by the right wing over an issue such as this shows that many in Indian society still believe that women are incapable of making decisions of love on their own. It also shows that men feel they have the authority to protect women's virtue and protect the wombs of women for the use of their own community.

There is no doubt that the English missionaries sought to introduce Victorian sensibilities to India by privileging hetero-normative behavior. This, in essence, was rejection of the value of South Asian cultures, something that the English had to do to make Indian cultures seem inferior, in order to justify their rule. Having bought into the colonial way of thinking, Indian nationalists too started opposing any institutions that were seen as antithetical "to heterosexual monogamous marriage." These institutions, such as the courtesan culture, the practice of polygamy, and polyandry were opposed because they went against Victorian English ideals of what a family unit should look like and how men and women should behave in matrimony.[364]

In many cases families do accept their children's same-sex marriages, but it is something that is generally negotiated by various means. "Hindu spaces, often seen by the Indian Left as irredeemably reactionary, have in fact often worked…to support female couples" and "the women themselves and their supporters…use Hindu vocabulary and doctrine to legitimize these marriages."[365] As a result, the Hindu right has been

[363] Gupta, "Hindu Women, Muslim Men," 15.
[364] Vanita, "Same-Sex Weddings," 49.
[365] Vanita, "Same-Sex Weddings," 53. Popular media has been helping by advocating for same-sex union and by educating the public on *gandharva vivah* (marriage based on mutual love) which is a traditionally

actively engaged in trying to come to some form of uniformity in the doctrinal view of same-sex unions, so that the general consensus would be against the acceptance of such marriages.[366] When the couple does not find acceptance from the family or their community (and if the family gets the authorities involved in order to break up such unions) it often results in "love suicide" - a phenomenon that takes place in heterosexual love-marriages as well. The couple commits suicide together rather than be forced to live apart. It also becomes their symbolic gesture that says they will be together in death, or the next life.[367]

Given the pressure that can come from the family and how society looks at same-sex unions, men and women both have to hide their love. However, women in India from all faiths and communities have even less freedom than men to openly engage in romantic relationships. And they are even more restricted when they are romantically involved in a same-sex partnership. Although Azmi does not explicitly mention same-sex unions, he does leave space for an interpretation that can include any kind of love a woman may engage in. He champions women's romantic and sexual desires and wants them to be able to act upon their feelings openly, without being encumbered by religious, political, and any other prejudices of society.

In the next poem about a Russian woman, the poet takes on the persona of this strong, socialist woman, and speaks as she would. The Progressive Writer's Movement was aligned with the ideal of socialism, so Azmi taking on the role of a woman in Soviet

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accepted form of marriage in ancient and medieval scriptures. Many temples also help in acceptance of such unions by allowing couples to undergo their marriage rituals there.

[366] Vanita, "Same-Sex Weddings," 57.

[367] Vanita, "Same-Sex Weddings," 51.

Russia comes as no surprise. Azmi was both a communist and an advocate of women's rights, and this poem would suggest that Azmi saw the strong Russian woman as a role model for all women:

rūsī aurat kā na'rā - Russian Woman's Rallying Cry[368]

jalātī hū'ī sēkṛoṅ gulistāṅ
caman par mirē phaṭ paṛī hai ḳhizāṅ
girā kar har ik shāḳh sē bijliyāṅ
uṭhā kar har ik gul sē surḳh āndhiyāṅ
ḳhizāṅ ko caman sē nikālūṅ gī maiṅ
vatan-e-ṣāf tujko bacālūṅ gī maiṅ

Burning hundreds of gardens
Autumn has descended on my flowerbed
Causing lightning to drop from each branch
Picking up red dust storms from each rose
I will extricate autumn from the garden
Oh pure homeland, I will save you

mirī qūatēṅ rā'gāṅ ab nahīṅ
ḥayāt-o-'amal badgumāṅ ab nahīṅ
mirā nām kamzoriyāṅ ab nahīṅ
galē mēṅ voh tauq-e-girāṅ ab nahīṅ
voh tauq ab galē mēṅ nah ḍālūṅ gī maiṅ
vatan-e-ṣāf tujko bacālūṅ gī maiṅ

My efforts are not in vain now
Existence and action are not distrustful now
My name is not weaknesses now
Around my neck is not that heavy collar now
I will not put that collar around my neck now
Oh pure homeland, I will save you

mirī zindagī markaz-e-ġham nahīṅ
kisī kē qadam par jabīṅ ḳham nahīṅ
mēṅ sho'lah bhī hūṅ ṣirf shabnam nahīṅ
kisī sē kisī ṯaraḥ bhī kam nahīṅ
qadam kaisē pīchē haṭālūṅ gī mēṅ
vatan-e-ṣāf tujko bacālūṅ gī maiṅ

[368] Kaifi Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 106-07.

My life is not the abode of sorrow
My brow is not bent on anyone's footsteps
I am a flame as well, not just the dew
I am no less than anyone in anyway
How can I backtrack now?
Oh pure homeland, I will save you

jo ġhāfil thī voh āj bēdār hai
jo lorī thī voh āj lalkār hai
jo naġhmah thī voh āj jhankār hai
jo sū'ī thī voh āj talvār hai
galē fataḥ koab lagālūṅ gī maiṅ
vatan-e-ṣāf tujko bacālūṅ gī maiṅ

She who was negligent is vigilant today
What was a lullaby is a shout today
What was a song is a scream today
What was a needle is a sword today
I will embrace victory now
Oh pure homeland, I will save you

kaṛaktī hū'ī nāziyat kī kamāṅ
camaktī hū'ī tāj kī bijliyāṅ
macaltī hū'ī zar kī cingāriyāṅ
miṭā kar yah sab neḥis tārīkiyāṅ
fiẓā'oṅ mēṅ surḳhī uchālūṅ gī maiṅ
vatan-e-ṣāf tujko bacālūṅ gī maiṅ

Sizzling rainbow of pride
Glittering flashes of a crown
Sizzling sparks of gold
Wiping all this inauspicious darkness
I will toss up rouge in the air
Oh pure homeland, I will save you

He establishes this woman as the only one who can be the true savior of her pure homeland. At the end of each stanza the woman affirms that she will save the homeland. The poet does not have her assisting men in saving the homeland, but instead has her

claim sole responsibility of the important task of saving the nation from corruption and complacency.

In the first stanza the woman observes that autumn is descending on her flowerbed. She notices a change for the worse in her homeland and vows to take action. Her first action is to use red dust storms in order to take care of the malaise. The imagery of the red dust storm alludes to a strong, sweeping action, in line with the fundamental values of communism. According to the poet, the values of communism that assured her an equal status, so she could be an equal contributor to society; these are evident in the second stanza. She brings to attention the fact that she is at a place now where her efforts will not go to waste, because society finally recognizes her value. The collar of servitude that kept her in a subservient position for ages is no longer around her neck. She has faith in herself that her life is going to be one of action. She has shunned those weaknesses that society labeled her with, barring her from being and equal citizen of her country. Her status is not beneath anyone else, she reminds the reader in the third stanza. She does not have to bow down to anyone and she does not belong at anyone's feet. There is fire and passion in her; she is a flame, not just the dew. She is no longer destined to a life of mediocrity and sorrow, since she can act out her passions. The progress that she has made is something that will only increase, there is no backtracking and regressing to the way things used to be.

In the next stanza she lists how things used to be. Women themselves were not aware of their potential and their worth. They were negligent, but now they are aware of what they are capable. Everything is different for women now; they are no longer the soft

lullaby, but instead, their existence has become a cry for action and progress. She is not a melodious song simply to be enjoyed; she has become a loud scream that must be heard, and which demands attention. She used to hold a needle in her hand and do domestic work, but that needle has transformed into a sword, which lets her fight for her rights. She will be victorious because things will never be as they used to be, now that she is self-aware. It is because of this self-awareness and empowerment that she has become a symbol of pride, as she reminds the reader in the last stanza. She will take it upon herself to safeguard and promote the values of communism; she will be the one to save the purity of her homeland.

Marxist and Socialist thought was central to the beliefs of many progressive writers like Kaifi Azmi. The Soviet Union and its policies also influenced the actions of progressive writers. The Central Committee of the Soviet Union created the Union of Soviet Writers on April 23, 1932. The Union rejected the idea of art for art's sake, and instead wanted writers to produce "purposive art" which would champion and portray socialist realism in their art.[369] Socialist Realism was a movement founded by Maxim Gorky in 1931, which adhered to the ideology "that literature and politics were all of a piece, with literature providing a vision of a future socialist reality."[370] This belief of literature providing a vision and direction that would lead to a socialist reality in which justice and equality would prevail, was the cornerstone of the PWA.

[369] Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement," 649.
[370] Ann Lowry Weir, "Socialist Realism and South Asian Literature." *Journal of South Asian Literature* 27, no. 2 (1992): 135.

The Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) was founded in the wake of the creation of Union of Soviet Writers in 1936 and it attracted many Urdu writers. The socialist ideals of equality of all people appealed to many Urdu writers of the time. Urdu writers, especially Muslim writers, had already put their art to the purpose of Muslim awakening in India under the leadership of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Iqbal, so their attraction to the guidelines of PWA manifesto was understandable.[371] Azmi was among these writers and poets who were attracted to the ideals of social justice and equality that the Union of Soviet Writers sought to promote. Azmi and his fellow PWA members were committed to the communist cause and believed that true progress could only be achieved by promoting communist ideals.

These were not just the ideals of a literary movement but of a movement that sought to bring about social and political change by reaching out to people through literature. This change that the PWA wanted to effect in society was in line with the socialist order in the Soviet Union. In fact the progressive writers' sentiments were aligned with the Soviet Union in not just domestic affairs but in international affairs too. When the British Viceroy in India called for Indians to prepare to enter the war effort in 1939 (at the time when Germany and the Soviet Union had signed a nonaggression pact), Kaifi Azmi was among the poets who opposed this declaration of war in his poetry. The

[371] Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement," 651. Muhammad Iqbal explained the theory of purposive art in his works *Asrār-i Khudī* (1914) and *Zabur-i 'Ajam* (1924). Hindi writers became more involved this Marxist literaty movement after Partition in 1947, but between 1936-47 Urdu writers were the ones who were most involved in the movement in India.

progressive writers blamed the Allies for creating the conditions that brought them to war, and warned that this would finally put an end to their imperialism.[372]

The nature of PWA as an organization and Azmi's dream of creating a socialist India help explain why he would hail the Russian woman, and cast her as a model for all Indian women to emulate. It is apparent from this poem that he viewed the Russian woman as a strong force who was capable of effecting change in her society. If Indian women wanted to have equality and win their rights they too had to become strong like the Russian woman.

The next poem is Kafi Azmi's tribute to a female Indian leader who walked alongside men in the nationalist movement that secured India's independence from Great Britain:

Sarojini Naidu[373]

> *'azīz māṅ, mirī haṅs mukh, mirī bahādur māṅ*
> *tamām jauhar-e-fiṯrat jagā diyē tūnē*
> *muhabbat apnē caman sē, guloṅ sē, ḳhāroṅ sē*
> *muhabbatoṅ kē ḳhazānē luṭā diyē tūnē*

Dear Mother, my cheerful mother, my bold mother
You embody all the merits of nature
You love your garden, flowers, and even thorns
You spent all the treasure of your love

> *banā banā kē miṭā'ē ga'ē naqūsh-e-'amal*
> *tirē baġhēr mukammal nah hosakī taṣvīr*
> *voh ḳhavāb jhāṅsī kī rānī ko jis nē caunkāyā*
> *tirā jihād-e-musalsil isī kī hai ta'bīr*

Plans for action were discarded after having been made
Without you the picture could not be completed

[372] Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement," 654.
[373] Kaifi Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 232.

That dream which startled Jhansi ki Rani
Your continuous struggle is the interpretation of that very dream

isē ḥayāt kā solah singār kehtē haiṅ
tirī janīṅ peh haiṅ kuch salvatēṅ bhī ṭīkā bhī
naẕar mēṅ jazb-e-yaqīṅ, dil mēṅ soz-e-āzādī
dahaktā phūl bhī hai tū mehektā sho'lah bhī

This is called the adornment of life
Upon your forehead are some wrinkles and a *tika* as well
Passion of belief in your vision, burning desire for independence in your heart
You are a burning flower too and a fragrant flame as well

żara zamīn ko meḥvar peh ghūm lēnē dē
yah duniyā tujh sē tirā soz-o-sāz māṅgē gī
jamāl sīkhē gā ḳhud a'tmādiyāṅ tujh sē
ḥayāt-e-nau tirē dil kā gudāz māṅgē gī

Let the earth rotate on the axis a bit
This world will ask you for your song and instrument
Grace itself will learn confidence from you
New life will ask for your heart's softness

Sarojini Naidu was an Indian poet, activist, and a political leader. She was born in Hyderabad in 1879 to Bengali parents, however her language was Urdu. She used her poetry to represent the suffering of Indians, especially women. She addressed issues that Azmi would later take on in his poetry; issues like widow immolation and unfulfilled sexuality of women. She was involved in the Quit India Movement and worked alongside leaders like Gandhi for India's independence. She viewed India's liberation as inseparable from women's liberation. Because of her active role and influence in the nationalist movement she was elected to become the first Indian Woman president of the National Congress in 1925. In 1930 she took part in Gandhi's Salt March, and when he

was arrested she took on the leadership of the non-violent movement. However, she was not immune from imprisonment and was arrested and imprisoned several times herself.[374]

Azmi's poem hailing Sarojini Naidu is quite telling of not only his politics, but also of his admiration for strong, independent women. He acknowledges her contributions to society and how much she has devoted herself to improving the lives of others. Her love for India and Indians is so great that she loves all, regardless of their status in society. Azmi assigns so much importance to the role Sarojini played in India that he thinks that without her many movements in India would not have been quite so successful. Azmi puts her on such a pedestal that he addresses her as mother – a mother to all Indians. This title of mother, that Azmi gives Naidu, further establishes his identity as a non-sectarian Indian. He hails a woman of non-Muslim descent as the mother to all Indians, making it evident that he did not view his society along religious lines. When describing Naidu, he uses some of the same vocabulary that he used to describe the woman in his poem *'Aurat*. She is described as both a fragrant flower but also a spark. She, quite like the Russian woman, is a model for Indian women, perhaps even more influential because of her Indian-ness.

Although Kaifi Azmi does not use the *ghazal* genre too often, he does have a handful of *ghazal*s in his oeuvre. As discussed earlier, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the IMF had deleterious effects on women. Capitalism and its extension commercialism have affected women all over the world; women's labor has been exploited and their bodies have been objectified in order to sell products. Women

[374] Meena Alexander, "Sarojini Naidu: Romanticism and Resistance." *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 43 (1985): 55-60.

continue to struggle for equality in the commercial sector in both the developing and the developed world. The following poem is an example in which Azmi employs the *ghazal* genre to oppose capitalism and commercialism:

ġhazal[375]

hāth ākar lagā ko'ī
mērā chappar uṭhā gayā ko'ī

lag gayā ik mashīn mēṅ maiṅ bhī
shehar mēṅ lē kē ā gayā ko'ī

maiṅ khaṛā thā keh pīṭh par mērī
ishtehār ik lagā gayā ko'ī

yah ṣadī dhūp ko tarastī hai
jaisē sūraj ko khā gayā ko'ī

aisī mehangā'ī hai keh cehrah bhī
bēc kē apnā khā gayā ko'ī

ab voh armān haiṅ nah voh sapnē
sab kabūtar uṛā gayā ko'ī

voh ga'ē jab sē aisā lagtā hai
choṭā moṭā ḳhudā gayā ko'ī

mērā bacpan bhī sāth lē āyā
gā'oṅ sē jab bhī ā gayā ko'ī

Having come someone left touching
Someone picked up my thatched roof and left

I too became utilized in a machine
Someone brought me over to the city

As I stood, upon my back
Someone pasted an advertisement

[375] Kaifi Azmi, *Kaifīyāt: Kuliyāt-e-Kaifi Azmi*, 361.

This century is longing for sunshine
As if someone consumed the sun

There is so much inflation
That someone has sold off his face

Now there is neither that yearning, nor those dreams
Someone caused all the pigeons to fly away

Since they left it feels as if
Some minor deity has left

He also brought my childhood with him
Whenever someone came from the village

The *ghazal* genre, which is quite often used to convey the plight of a lover in a situation of unrequited love, is an interesting choice for this poem. Azmi does not stay true to the conventions of *ghazal* and does not use the regular tropes when he employs this genre in order to make political and cultural statements.[376] However, the case can be made that Azmi simply uses different characters in order to represent the common characters of a *ghazal*. We can look at the villager as the lover, who has lost his beloved, the village. The industrialized city is the garden that has been ruined, and the orthodoxy of religion in the *ghazal* that crushes the hopes and dreams of people, is replaced by the capitalist order. This *ghazal* in this way provides a good example of Azmi's resistance to the accepted conventions of Urdu poetry and how he problematizes them by using new characters and themes in this genre.

Although each couplet in a *ghazal* is a free-standing poem unto itself, most couplets of this *ghazal* allude to the changing state of society that Azmi opposes. In this

[376] The conventional *ghazal* poem would be about the lover pining for the beloved and using the age-old tropes of garden and nightingale, and moth and flame, to represent different forms of love. However, the *ghazal* genre is frequently used to address many other subjects including political.

poem Azmi is making a statement about capitalism, and the bewilderment and disenchantment of village people upon coming to the city. The opening hemistich introduces the subject of this poem as a male resident of a village who lives in a thatched-roof hut. However, at someone's hands his roof is taken away from him and he is displaced. The subject says he is put to work at a machine after someone brought him to the city. The language used *"lag gayā ik mashīn mēṅ"* suggests that this person is not enthused about this line of work, but instead is doing this out of necessity, and due to lack of other opportunities.[377]

The third hemistich has a sarcastic tone and an allusion to the excesses of capitalism. The subject is just standing somewhere, minding his own business, when someone places an advertisement on his back. Even his body is not his own and has been appropriated, unwillingly and unwittingly, for the advancement of capitalist consumption. Industrialization, a significant part of the capitalist enterprise, is known to create smog and even pollute rivers. The poem's subject witnesses this environmental pollution and comments that this century has not seen the sun, as if someone has consumed the sun. The pollution of the city must come as even a bigger shock to someone coming from the cleaner environment of the village.

The poem goes on to address the issue of inflation in the fifth hemistich. The narrator states that there is so much inflation that one has to sell his identity and his whole being in order to survive. The face, which is the identity marker and differentiates us from others, has been lost. In this new order there is no individuality, there is only the

[377] Furthermore, the narrator speaks in first person singular, instead of using the "royal we" which is more common in *ghazal* form, perhaps to emphasize his laborer status.

grind of industrial work and the worker is just like another cog in the machine, indistinguishable from the rest. There are no more dreams and desires left. Someone has taken away all means, as if shooing away all the pigeons that may have been used to send out a message.

The last two hemistiches change the tone of the poem. The "someone" is no longer an un-named, menacing entity that has been the cause of so much ill. Of course that which is referred to as "someone" up till now is actually a "something." It is revealed as the capitalist order that has affected society so much that it has left many in a state of confusion. Instead of making people's lives better, it has left them deprived of opportunities, in order to utilize the people's existence for its own benefit. The poem closes with the subject observing yet another person from the village coming into the city. He observes the same naïvete and sees his own childhood in this person's face. The last hemistich suggests that the subject may have been a child worker, forced to become a laborer in a factory.

IV. Kaifi Azmi's Reception Beyond the Mushā'ira Circuit

The Bombay-based Hindi-Urdu film industry, one of the largest in the world, owes Kaifi some of its finest stories and lyrics:

vaqt nē kiyā kyā ḥasīn sitam
tum rahē nah tum ham rahē nah ham
beqarār dil is ṯarḥa milē
jis ṯarḥa kabhī ham judā nah thē
tum bhī kho ga'ē ham bhī kho ga'ē
ik rah par calē kē do qadam
jā'ēngē kahāṅ sūjhtā nahīṅ
cal paṛē magar rastah nahīṅ

kyā talāsh hai kuch pātā nahīṅ
ban rahē haiṅ din ḳhab dam ba dam[378]

Time has wrought, what pretty tyrannies
Neither do you remain you, nor do I remain I
Restless hearts, meet in such ways:
As though we were, never drawn apart
You lost your way, I lost my way
After walking on one path, for a few steps
Where shall we go? We do not know
We have set out. We cannot find the road
What do we seek? We do not know
The days continue to weave
Dreams at every breath

With a haunting melody, Geeta Dutt, the forlorn wife of the film's director and hero, Guru Dutt, sang this song for the film's leading actress, Waheed Rahman, who by this time had become the director's muse. The tragic film *Kāġhaz Kē Phūl* (Paper Flowers) would go on to acquire a cult status even though it was not considered a commercial success when it was released in 1959—the film's status only rose when the director committed suicide in 1964 and this film about a marriage falling apart became an index for the director's own life, for a life ground between the wife and the paramour. Guru Dutt was Kaifi's close friend. Kaifi's lyrics for Dutt's film reached every corner of India that had access to a radio. The film's most memorable tropes concern the shiftingly tragic relationships between time and romance, between men and women, between social status and personal passion, between union and separation. Kaifi carries this tragedy forward in collaboration with Ismat Chughtai, Shama Zaidi, M.S. Sathyu, and Balraj Sahni (one of India's most socially conscious artists) to pen the best film to date on the 1947 Partition,

[378] Guru Dutt (Director), *Kāġhaz Kē Phūl,* Lyrics: Kaifi Azmi, Voice: Geeta Dutt, Music: S.D. Burman, 1959.

Garam Havā (Scorching Winds). How did women figure into the power struggles between men, between nations that men led and divided? Kaifi and his collaborators answered this question with passion and nuance in this 1973 film. The issue of class intersected with issues of women's suppression and the nations that emerged after 1947 were boldly projected as those at the mercy of religious exclusivism and male chauvinism—both India and Pakistan were implicated in their own regression, especially when it came to women.[379]

The Bombay film industry noticed Kaifi's presence in its milieu as long as the poet was alive, and even after his death. Apart from Kaifi's own writings, his wife Shaukat had also established herself as a serious actor working in theatre and as a member of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)—this organization with its Marxist agenda oversaw the production of finely crafted socially conscious performances and at times worked hand in hand with the Progressive Writers. Shaukat as a creative workingwoman spoke of Kaifi as a man who not only lent his sincere voice to women's most pressing causes but also as an encouraging husband and father. Shaukat and Kaifi's daughter, Shabana Azmi, is in the first rank of movie celebrities in South Asia. She is a vocal proponent of women's causes, especially those that also relate to class oppression. She played a leading role in the first major 1996 Indian film touching on explicitly sexual love between women (*Fire*), served in India's parliament, and works to empower the

[379] Conversations with Syed Akbar Hyder, March, 2015.

"girl child" in Mijwan (a small town near Azamgarh and birthplace of Kaifi) in honor of her father.[380]

[380] Conversations with Syed Akbar Hyder, March, 2015.

Chapter Five: Parveen Shakir

voh mērē pāoṅ ko chunē jhukā thā jis lamḥē
usē maiṅ jān bhī detī amīr aisī thi[381]

The moment he bowed down to touch my feet
I could have given him my life, so wealthy was I

Parveen Skakir

While Parveen Shakir (1952-1994) gained much fame as a poet, like Akhtar Shirani she too became associated with and known for her poetry of love and romance, instead of her feminist poetry. In restricting themselves to surface-level readings of the love poetry of Parveen Shakir, critics have overlooked how her poems address women's issues as well as those societal issues that have an impact on women's lives, often disproportionately, and in more profound ways than they do on men. The selection of poems in this chapter will highlight Parveen Shakir's engagement with the lives of women, children, and the poor, in a society that reserves most of its rights and privileges for upper and middle-class men. I argue that critics have failed to recognize Shakir's poetry as feminist because it does not directly/overtly challenge and question male dominance.

Despite winning several poetry awards and honors Parveen Shakir does not appear in Rukhsana Ahmad's canonical work of feminist Urdu poetry from Pakistan, *We*

[381] Parveen Shakir, *Khushbū*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1999), 331.

Sinful Women (1991).[382] This work, the first of its kind in the world of feminist Urdu literature, includes the poetry of Ada Jafri, Kishwar Naheed, Fahmida Riaz, and Ishrat Afreen, as well Sara Shagufta and Zehra Nigah. Even on the rare occasion that Parveen Shakir has been included amongst the feminists of Urdu poetry, as in Ambreen Salahuddin's *Feminism in Modern Urdu Poetesses*, she has been referred to as "the poetess of fragrance" and her romantic poetry has been the focus of attention.[383] *Fragrance*, the title of Parveen Shakir's first poetry volume, was published when she was twenty-four years old. Although Shakir produced and published several more volumes in the remaining eighteen years of her life, the poetry she composed in these early years, widely recognized as highly *feminine*, rather than *feminist*, is foregrounded at the expense of her later work.

As discussed earlier, recent scholarship on feminism has shown that feminism is not only practiced through vocal and direct resistance to male dominance; feminist agency is also acted out through strategic silence, and by appropriating and subverting the nature of patriarchal practices normally considered repressive towards women.[384] As these poems will demonstrate, Parveen Shakir raises awareness about social issues by compelling the reader to empathize with the subjects of her poems, rather than by directly challenging societal norms of patriarchy. This sample of poems demonstrates a spectrum of issues including women in the workplace, sexual harassment, arranged marriage, child

[382] See Ahmad. *We Sinful Women*, (1991).
[383] Ambreen Salahuddin, *Feminism in Modern Urdu Poetesses (1857-2000)*, (Lahore: West Pakistan Urdu Academy, 2005), 101-118.
[384] Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1994). 40-59. See aslo: Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, (2005).

labor, women's experiences of being objects of desire, and even sectarian violence that affects women to a greater degree than it affects men.

Most importantly, perhaps even those works previously categorized as love poems deserve reconsideration, as many of these deal with the difficulties faced by women in expressing and experiencing love on their own terms, as Kaifi Azmi had exhorted them to do. Urdu poetry composed by women is different from the classical Urdu poetry in which women's bodies were the subject of men's lust and fantasies. The love that women write about in Urdu poetry reflects their own desires and pleasures, their satisfaction with bodily sensations, their disappointment, and even betrayal.[385] Furthermore, as far as Pakistani society is concerned, the relationship of love between a man and a woman is not equal, "because of the gendered nature of their experiences as men and women."[386] And women's sexuality is such a taboo subject that a many women cannot even discuss matters of sexual intimacy with their partners.[387] Parveen Shakir used her poetry to give voice to women's experiences of love and romance in Pakistan.[388] Shakir's poetry is the voice of a woman who feels vulnerable and confident, desired and discriminated against.

I. Historical Context

Parveen Shakir grew up in a Pakistan that was struggling to come to terms with its identity as a nation created for the Muslims of South Asia. Some say that it was in

[385] Oesterheld, "Islam in Contemporary South Asia," 217-243.
[386] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 123.
[387] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 129-30.
[388] Imran Khan, ""Just a Girl" and Other Poems: Revisiting the Writings of Parveen Shakir." Sagar: A South Asia Research Journal, 21. (2013): 42-49.

December of 1930 that the poet-philosopher Muhammad Iqbal put forth the idea of a separate Muslim nation in India. During the presidential address of the All India Muslim League meeting, Iqbal called for a Muslim India to be created out of the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and N.W.F.P. (North West Frontier Province), where Muslims were in the numerical majority.[389]

Even though Pakistan was created with a vision of having a united Muslim citizenry, it could not sustain this model; sectarian issues started arising soon after Partition in 1947. Some say that the problem of sectarianism in Pakistan today may be traced to the fact that, "the unity of this Muslim nation was based on fear of a Hindu majority which was a factor external to the Muslim community."[390] In their goal to achieve a separate nation-state independent from the Hindu majority, the leadership among the Muslim politicians failed to address the question of various forms of other "nationalisms inside the Muslim community"- linguistic, religious, sectarian, and geographical.[391]

The paradigm of creating a nation-state around a common religion by disregarding other identity markers is problematic. Analyzing the creation of Pakistan around religious nationalism, Anwar H. Syed explains that, "it is the state that makes the nation, not the nation that makes the state." The state has to actively create a national

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[389] Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 12.
- *See* also: Nasir Islam, "Islam and National Identity: The Case of Pakistan and Bangladesh," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13, no. 1. (1981): 55-72. In popular historical lore of Pakistan, Iqbal is celebrated as the person who first envisioned a separate nation for the Muslims of India. The Muslim that, "Islamic society could only be preserved by creating an Islamic state" (p. 55). However, neither Iqbal nor the Muslim League leadership elaborated how this state for the Muslims of India was to be structured.
[390] Islam, "Islam and National Identity," 56.
[391] Islam, "Islam and National Identity," 56.

sentiment; the feelings of nationalism cannot be conjured up over-night based on any one cultural or sectarian commonality.[392] So the idea of creating a state based on a single common denominator of religion is a flawed concept, especially if the state does not address the differences that can surface as challenges to that aspect of national identity. For Pakistan, the use of religious identity to form a nation became a problematic concept for various reasons. While the government tried to create an Islamic Republic based on the *Sunni* doctrine, it alienated and marginalized vast segments of its citizenry, such as Ahmadis and Shias.

The weakness of the idea of forming a nation around a religious identity was further revealed when ethnic and linguistic nationalism became the impetus for the civil war that erupted in 1971 between Pakistan's western and eastern wings. The civil war resulted in the secession of East Pakistan and the creation of the nation-sate of Bangladesh. The loss of East Pakistan, home to Pakistan's majority Bengali ethnic group, and its most significant Hindu minority population, caused Pakistan to reassess its national identity.[393]

The secession of East Pakistan meant that what was left of Pakistan was no longer the home of the majority of Indian Muslims (Bangladesh and India both claimed more Muslim citizens than Pakistan). Struggling to find a new identity, groups such as the *Islam pasand* (promoters of Islam), and illegitimate political regimes (like those of Zia

[392] Anwar H. Syed. "The Idea of a Pakistani Nationhood," *Polity*, 12, no. 4. (1980): 578.
[393] William L. Richter, "The Political Dynamics of Islamic Resurgence in Pakistan." *Asian Survey*, 19, no. 6 (1979): 549. The population of East Pakistan was larger than that of West Pakistan and with the two wings intact Pakistan could claim to have a majority of South Asian Muslims as its citizens. With the creation of Bangladesh, both it and India had more Muslims than Pakistan, the country created for South Asian Muslims.

ul-Haq) sought to gain legitimacy by turning to Islam. If Pakistan was no longer the home of the majority of Muslims in the sub-continent then it had to become the home of the *purest* of the Muslims in South Asia.[394]

The loss of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), the failure of Ayub Khan's capitalist experiment, and the failure of Bhutto's and Pakistan People's Party's socialism led Pakistani politicians to use Islamization as a new method of gaining support among the populace.[395] On April 17, 1977, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1928-1979), himself tied to the minority Shii community, announced that he was starting the process of imposing *Shar'ia* law in Pakistan. Islamic law was to be enforced throughout the country within six months. This declaration also brought into effect the immediate and total prohibition of alcohol and gambling.[396]

General Zia ul-Haq took over the reigns of power when he successfully orchestrated a military coup against the elected government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. In Zia's view Islam was the only remedy for the problems that Pakistan faced, and he embarked on an even more vigorous process of Islamization.[397] However, instead of uniting the country, Zia's Islamization of Pakistan led to the creation of more divisions in a country already marred with ethnic and linguistic divisions. Sentiments of communal divisiveness between Shi'a and Sunni communities increased as the military backed

[394] Richter, "The Political Dynamics," 550.
[395] Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 148-84. Ayub Khan was the Chief Martial Law Administrator and President of Pakistan 1958-1969. He believed that western capitalism was the means to modernize and enrich the country. Although his policies led to a significant increase in production and the GNP it kept the wealth of the country in the hands of a few oligarchs.
[396] Richter, "The Political Dynamics," 552.
[397] Lawrence Ziring. "Public Policy Dilemmas and Pakistan's Nationality Problem: The Legacy of Zia ul-Haq." (1988, p. 798).

political regime of General Zia politicized their differences.[398] Islamization, and the laws the government initiated in order to bring the Constitution of Pakistan in congruence with the *Sharia*, affected the women of Pakistan more adversely than any other group. The *Hudood* Ordinances, as these discriminatory laws were called, are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.[399]

II: Biographical Information

Sayyida Parveen Bano Shakir was born on November 24, 1952, in Karachi, Pakistan.[400] She was the daughter of Sayyid Shakir Hussain and Afzal al-Nisa. Her father had moved to Karachi in 1945, two years before the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. Her mother came to Karachi after she married Parveen's father in Patna, India. Parveen Shakir's older sister, Nasreen Bano, was born on March 14, 1950.[401] At the time of Parveen's birth her father worked as a clerk in the Pakistan Telephone and Telegraph Department.[402] Her family lived in the Rizviah Colony, one of the new settlements built

[398] Vali R. Nasr. "International Politics, Domestic Imperatives, and Identity Mobilization: Sectarianism in Pakistan, 1979-1998." *Comparative Politics*, 32, no. 2. (2000, p. 171). *Shi'a* Muslims, the followers of the party of Ali believe that Muhammad's spiritual authority was passed on to his chosen descendants. The *Shi'a* comprise 15% - 25% of Pakistan's population.

[399] Parveen Shakir's poetry addresses the circumstances of women in the Pakistani society, which must be understood in context of the patriarchal and restrictive nature of Islamization.

[400] Aliyah Jalil Shah, *Tanhā Cānd: Parveen Shakir, Fan Aur Shakhsiyat*, (Lahore: Vaqaar Publications, 1997), 19. Ayesha Jalil Shah did a comprehensive biographical project on Parveen Shakir for her M.A. thesis at Government College Lahore. Her thesis is one of the most extensive biographies of Parveen Shakir. She had access to Shakir's friends and family who provided her with Shakir's official documents and personal letters.

[401] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 18–19.
- Sayyid A. H. Tandvi, *Parveen Shakir: Ġhazlon Kē Ā'inē Mēṅ*, (India: Nishat Offset Press Tandah, 2000), 5. However, Tandvi writes that her parents both migrated to Pakistan at the time of Partition.

[402] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 21.

in Karachi to accommodate the numerous migrants who moved to the city both before and after Partition.[403]

During her childhood Parveen's family used to lovingly call her *Pāro* (adorable).[404] In the following verses Shakir sheds some light on how she fondly remembered her childhood; however, they also show her sensitive and melancholy personality:[405]

bacpan kē dukh kitnē achē hotē thē
tab to ṣirf khilaunē ṭūṭā kartē thē

How lovely were the sorrows of childhood
Then, only the toys would break

ab to ik āṅsū bhī afsurdah kar jātā hai
bacpan mēṅ jī bhar kē to ro lētē thē

Now, even one tear causes sorrow
In childhood, we cried to our hearts content

These verses show how fondly Shakir thought of her childhood, compared to her adult life. Shakir's mother describes her as both sensitive, and very stubborn as a child, and says that she used to lose her shoes when she went out to play and cry up a storm while getting her hair brushed. She loved ice cream and bubble gum. Parveen loved animals and had several pets as a child - a chick, a cat, and a rabbit. She was headstrong and dear to the parents as well, so she would always manage to get her way in everything. She was

[403] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 18.
[404] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 19. Parveen Shakir's full given name was Parveen Bano Shakir but her National Identity Card stated Parveen B. Shakir; because of this her name appears as Parveen Begum Shakir in some places.
[405] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 19-20.

inept at household work and chores, and was always interested in studies.[406] These descriptions of Parveen Shakir help us understand some of her personality, her free-spirited nature, sensitivity, and stubbornness, all of which come across in her poetry in which she talks openly about love, romance, and desire from a woman's perspective. Poetry that discusses women's romantic and sexual desires unambiguously is not inconsequential in an Islamized society like Pakistan's. Given the context of the time when she was writing, Shakir's poetry indeed challenges and even subverts cultural norms and stereotypes about women.

Parveen Shakir's father stressed the importance of education upon his daughters from the very beginning and she did not disappoint her father. Shakir started going to Islamia School in Rizviah colony. When she was in the third grade she was promoted to the fifth grade due to her advanced aptitude.[407] She did most of her schooling in Karachi. After matriculating from Rizviah Girl's High School in 1966 she enrolled in Sir Syed Girl's College and earned a Fellow of Arts degree in 1968, followed by a Bachelor of Arts in 1971. After completing her undergraduate education Shakir enrolled in graduate school at Karachi University. While at Karachi University she studied English and earned a Master's degree in 1973.[408] She started working as a lecturer at Abdullah Girl's College, also in Karachi, after finishing her English Master's degree. Along with being an

[406] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 20–21.
[407] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 18–19.
[408] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 22–23.

educator Shakir wrote for the *Daily Jang* newspaper as well.[409] She then went on to earn a degree in English linguistics at Karachi University in 1980.[410]

In 1981 Shakir took the civil service exam and placed second in it.[411] The following year, in 1982, she attended the Civil Service Academy in Lahore. The next year she was selected to continue her training in the Customs and Excise Department in Karachi. After completing her training she was assigned to the Customs Department in Karachi as an Assistant Collector.[412] Although Shakir had excelled in the Civil Service examinations she was not able to get in the Foreign Service, as she had wanted. Pakistan had been placed under martial law and women had been barred from working in Pakistan's Foreign Service. After serving several years in Karachi she was transferred to Islamabad, in 1988.[413]

Parveen Shakir continued her further graduate and professional schooling in the United States in 1991, when she was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to attend Harvard University. During her tenure as a Fulbright scholar she taught South Asian literature at Trinity College through the Hartford Consortium for Higher Education.[414] She also taught courses on politics and culture of Pakistan and Bangladesh at St. Joseph College. Parveen Shakir was involved in non-academic activities at Harvard University as well, and 1991 she served as a sub-editor of Harvard News and Views newspaper. She completed her

[409] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 24.
[410] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 22–23. Shah does not state whether Shakir's degree in English linguistics was a bachelors or a masters.
[411] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 23.
[412] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 24.
[413] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 24.
[414] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 23. Shah does not give the location of Trinity College, however Trinity College, Hartford, CT is a member of the Hartford Consortium for Higher Education.

Master's of Public Administration degree at Harvard University in 1992.[415] When she returned to Pakistan that year Shakir was promoted to the position of Assistant Director of Customs Intelligence. She advanced to become the Deputy Director of Customs Inspection by 1993.[416] She was interested in going overseas again and getting a PhD, and wanted to research the 1971 Pakistan and Bangladesh war, but she could not fulfill that desire because of her untimely death in 1994.[417] Parveen Shakir was a well educated and an independent woman, her poetry should be read keeping in mind that she was a woman who was not one to be subservient, nor one to conform to any societal norms that did not respect a woman's equal status with men.

Parveen Shakir's love life was tumultuous and to her followers (who were growing in thousands) that becomes evident from the content of her love poetry, especially the melancholy *ghazals* like this one, from which these couplets are taken:

voh to ḳhūshbū hai, havāoṅ mēṅ bikhar jā'ēgā[418]
masa'lah phūl kā hai, phūl kidhar jā'ēgā

ham to samjhē thē keh ik zaḳham hai bhar jā'ēgā
kyā ḳhabar thī keh rag-e-jāṅ mēṅ utar jā'ēgā

He is the fragrance, he will be scattered in the winds
The dilemma is the flower's, where shall *it* go?

I thought it was only a wound, it will heal
I didn't know that it would seep down into my soul

Shakir's first love – and the inspiration behind much of her early poetry - was a government official.[419] At first her love remained unrequited; they were not of the same

[415] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 23.
[416] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 24.
[417] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 23.
[418] Parveen Shakir, *Khushbū*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*. Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1999, 188.

Muslim sect and their social status was also different from each other. When Shakir became very depressed, and fell ill, the man paid a visit to her father and asked for her hand in marriage. However, Shakir's father refused to allow this union on the basis of sectarian differences.[420]

In 1975, while Shakir was going through a serious bout of depression, her cousin, Dr. Naseer Ali, attended to her and treated her. While he was administering her care he became interested in marrying her. Naseer Ali was the son of Shakir's maternal aunt, and hence her first cousin. They were married in 1976; Parveen Shakir was twenty-four years old at the time.[421] Their marriage started showing signs of trouble very early. Shakir's aunt, and mother-in-law, was a woman who wanted Shakir to stay at home and take care of the family, however, Parveen Shakir did not submit to her mother-in-law's wishes. She had become a renowned poet and often participated at evening poetry gatherings; she continued to further her education at the same time too. Furthermore, Naseer Ali felt insecure due to Parveen Shakir's fame, and did not like the fact that he started being identified as Parveen's husband.[422]

Sayyid Murad Ali, her son, was born in 1979 when Parveen Shakir was twenty-seven years old, and one year away from receiving her second masters. She lovingly

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[419] Sayyid Tandvi, *Parveen Shakir*, 16. When Shakir was asked if having loved is necessary for poetry she replied that, "when a person learns what an important thing it is to love, and be loved, that person becomes civilized; love teaches patience and gives a person the strength to endure…when existence found the intuition for love, poetry was born."
[420] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 32. Shah explains that the reason why Shakir was so ambitious was because she wanted to raise her economic and social status. She did not want to feel less than others in any way.
[421] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 35. Marriage amongst cousins is a commonplace occurrence in Pakistan.
[422] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 36.

called her son *Gītū* and dedicated her third book, *Ḵhudkalāmī*, to him.[423] Shakir's marital life kept deteriorating over the years even though she tried to make things work. In order to work on their relationship Shakir and Naseer Ali tried living separately, however, this period of separation did not help in resolving the couple's differences. In 1987, at the age of thirty-one, Shakir divorced her husband and remained unmarried for the remaining years of her life.[424]

Parveen Shakir's family exposed her to Urdu poetry from an early age; her father was an award-winning amateur poet during his student days. Shakir started composing poetry in her teens and used the *taḳhallus* (pen name) of *Bīnā* (discerning, wise) in the beginning, but she soon gave it up and started using her real name. Initially she took on her maternal grandfather as her mentor, and would have him offer critique, and suggest corrections for her compositions.[425]

When Shakir was a student at Sir Syed College, Irfana Aziz, one of her teachers, pushed her towards composing and publishing poetry. Aziz asked her to compose a poem for the observation of Pakistan's Defense Day (September 6, 1965). Shakir composed a poem called *subhā-e-vatan* (Nation's Morning) and won first prize for it.[426] After this Shakir started taking part in poetry gatherings at her college and also at the inter-college level regularly.[427] Irfana Aziz offered *islah* (suggestions for corrections and improvements) on Parveen's poetry, and introduced her to Persian tropes and meters to

[423] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 36. *Khudkalāmī* includes poems such as *Mera Laal* – My beloved, *Teri Mohini Surat* – Your captivating face, which address her son.
[424] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 36.
[425] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 25-26.
[426] Tandvi, *Parveen Shakir*, 31. This was Parveen Shakir's first *mushai'ra* (poetry assembly), which was held in 1967 to honor the War of September 1965.
[427] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 27.

help her become a better poet. After a few years of serving as her teacher Aziz left for Canada and Shakir took on Ahmad Nadim Qasmi (1916 – 2006) as her mentor and master.[428] Qasmi and Shakir developed a close relationship and he became a true mentor, whom she thought of as a surrogate father. She lovingly called him *Ammū* and even dedicated her first book to him.[429]

Given their close relationship, Qasmi must have had an important effect on Parveen Shakir as a person and as a poet. Qasmi was an avid social activist and the secretary-general of the Progressive Writers' Association of Pakistan. Qasmi was often involved in rows with government officials due to his "subversive" writings, and was even jailed for those activities on two occasions.[430] Shakir looked up to Qasmi as a father figure and his life and works would have influenced Parveen's desire to challenge the injustice of society.[431]

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[428] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 27-28.

[429] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 29.
- K. C. Kanda, *Masterworks of Urdu Poetry*. New Delhi: New Dawn Press, 2004) 221. Qasmi was a famous Urdu poet and author of several short stories. He worked for a number of Urdu journals (*Tahzīb-e-Naswān, Phūl* and *Adab-e-Latīf*) during his lifetime. Qasmi's first poem was published in the journal *Siāsat* when he was only fifteen years old. Collections of his works include *Rim Jhim, Jalāl-o-Jamāl, Sholā-e-gul, Dasht-e-Wafā,* and *Māhīt*.

[430] BBC News, "Pakistan literary giant is dead." July 10, 2006.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5166788.stm

[431] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 204-210. Shah provides copies of some letters that Parveen wrote to her mentor, Qasmi, during the years 1990 and 1991 (the replies from Qasmi are not provided). At the time Parveen was studying in the United States. These letters demonstrate the closeness between the two and the amount of concern that she had for her mentor. She always writes to ask him if he is taking care of his health. Other than that she also gives him daily details of her life. On September 22, 1990, she writes that she received her first letter from Pakistan and it was Qasmi's. She tells him that she has started her classes [in the U.S.] and that she has four classes each week. She also informs him that she has purchased a second-hand (used) car and that this has helped her in going around town. She also goes on to tell Qasmi that Geetu has also started school and is very happy. On the 31st of January 1991, she writes to Qasmi that she had heard that he had fallen ill. She explains how she is troubled by the fact that she is unable to be there with him to take care of him in his time of need. On the first of May 1991, Parveen responds to a letter from Qasmi in which he had inquired about Parveen speaking ill of Qurrat ul-ain Hyder (1926 – 2007) the famous Urdu fiction writer from India. She responds by saying, "believe me Ammu, I haven't said anything. […] I have only mentioned her *Safar-nama* – travelogue. I haven't said anything negative…and I do not know why she

As noted earlier, Parveen Shakir worked at the *Daily Jang* newspaper in the early 1970s. She continued to publish her views in the newspaper into the 1990s. In her column, titled *goshā-e-cashm* (corner of the eye), she commented on myriad topics ranging from literary, cultural, and political.[432] In these columns she does not hesitate to criticize the government. Shakir used her editorials to call out the government on its shortcomings while discussing other issues. For instance, in an editorial published on May 22, 1994, she discussed the corruption of banks in regards to payment of employee salaries – including a quip that she was pleased to see that other things besides democracy are handed out in portions.[433] The thousands who were enamored of her could relate to this. In yet another editorial published on April 1, 1994, she wrote about her invitation to a women's studies conference – the first of its kind in the private sector in Pakistan. She used this opportunity to comment on the inefficiency of the government, stating wryly that, had the government organized the conference they would have tabled the preparation until finding the right minister, and once all the preparations were completed, the occasion would be canceled due to a change of government.[434]

These examples show that Shakir was interested in political issues of Pakistan and, further, was not afraid to share her views publicly. However, when it came to commenting on the government she did so indirectly. She was after all a government official, and challenging the government directly would have jeopardized her position. For her audiences, the community that mattered to her, Shakir became a glowing

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is so upset."[431] These letters offer a rare glimpse of her personal life and concerns and even inform us of the intrigue and politics that goes on between literary figures regarding who said what about whom.

[432] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 118.

[433] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 121.

[434] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 122.

counterimage to the bleak picture of Pakistan. Whether Shakir's lack of a bold, challenging stance in her poetry is always a product of conscious and deliberate choice, or just a reflection of her personality and stylistic choices is difficult to ascertain, but one can make the argument that she was a feminist poet – in her own way – and that she needs to be included in the canon of feminist Urdu poetry.

Shakir continued writing poetry throughout her life and won various awards and recognitions for her talents and her contribution to Urdu literature. Some of the most prestigious awards that she received include the following: Award for Best Poet, U.S.I.S., Karachi, 1970; Adamjee Literature Award, 1978; Gold medal – Best Poet of the Year, Sir Syed Girl's College, Karachi, 1979; Allama Iqbal Hijra Award, 1985; Zohoor-e Nazr award, India, 1986; Faiz Ahmed Faiz International Award for Poetry, Delhi, 1989; Pride of Performance Award Presidential Medal, Pakistan, 1991. The recognitions awarded to Shakir posthumously include the following: APNS 12th Journalistic Award, 1995; Shield of Recognition, Karachi Women's Peace Committee, 1997; Golden Women of Pakistan, Ladies' Forum, 1997.[435]

On the morning of December 26, 1994 Parveen Shakir had breakfast with her son Murad and left for work; while she was going to work her car was struck by a passenger wagon. The driver of her vehicle died on the scene and the other vehicle fled the scene of the accident. Shakir was rushed to Islamabad Hospital where she later died; she was forty-two years old.[436] To her devotees, this was not a simple accident. They referred to

[435] Sultanah Bakhsh, *Parveen Shakir: Shakhsiyat, Fikr-o-Fan*, (Islamabad: Lafz Log Publishing, 2000), 9 – 10.
[436] Shah, *Tanhā Cānd*, 40-41.

her as a martyr—martyred by those who envied her rise, those who feared her words, or perhaps those who were jilted by her.

III. Selected Poetry

The following two poems, taken from Parveen Shakir's first two volumes, shed some light on how Shakir viewed womanhood in the culture and society of Islamic Pakistan:

ṣirf ēk laṛkī - Just a Girl[437]

apnē sard kamrē mēṅ
maiṅ udās bēṭhī hūṅ
nīmvā darīcoṅ sē
nam havā'ēṅ ātī haiṅ
mērē jism ko chū kar
āg sī lagātī haiṅ
tērā nām lē lē kar
mujh ko gudgudātī haiṅ

kāsh mērē par hotē
tērē pās uṛ ātī
kāsh maiṅ havā hotī
tujh ko chū kē lauṭ ātī
maiṅ nahīṅ magar kuch bhī
saṅgdil rivājoṅ kē
āhnī ḥiṣāroṅ mēṅ
umar qēd kī mulzim
ṣirf ēk laṛkī hūṅ!

In my cold room,
I am sitting saddened
From half-open windows
Moist winds enter
Touching my body
Torching it somewhat
Taking your name over and over

[437]Parveen Shakir, *Khushbū*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*. 92-93.

They tickle me

How I wish I had wings,
I would fly to you
How I wish I were the wind
Having touched you I would return
I am not however, anything but
In iron fortresses
Accused of life-imprisonment,
Just a girl!

Nick Name[438]

tum mujh ko guṛiyā kehtē ho
ṭhīk hī kahtē ho____!
khēlnē vālē sab hāthoṅ ko maiṅ guṛiyā hī lagtī hūṅ
jo pehnā do, mujh peh sajē gā
mērā ko'ī rang nahīṅ
jis baccē kē hāth thamā do
mērī kisī sē jang nahīṅ
soctī jāgtī āṅkhēṅ mērī
jab cāhē bīnā'ī lē lo
yā mērī goyā'ī lē lo
māṅg bharo, sīndūr lagā'o
piyār karo, āṅkhoṅ mēṅ basā'o
aur phir jab dil bhar jā'ē to
dil sē uṭhā kē ṯāq peh rakh do
tum mujh ko guṛiyā kehtē ho
ṭhīk hī kehtē ho!

You call me Doll
You are quite right!
I appear like a doll to all playing hands
Whatever you make me wear will suit me
I do not have a color
Hand me off to any child
I do not oppose anyone
My waking and thinking eyes
Whenever you wish take my sight away
Wind me up and hear (my) words
Or take away my power of speech
Fill the parting of my hair, apply vermillion

[438]Parveen Shakir, *Ṣadbarg*, In *Mah-e-Tam*ā*m: Kulliy*ā*t*, 77-78.

Love me; settle me in your eyes
And then, when you've had your heart's fill
Take me from your heart and put me away in some niche
You call me Doll
You are quite right!

In the first poem Shakir establishes that being a girl, or a woman, is like a life-imprisonment. Such a state of being can be understood as mere existence since she is not truly in control of her own life. Her life is full of restrictions and rules that are meant to curtail her freedom and sense of individuality. Her desires cannot be fulfilled, and all she can do is hope to have just enough freedom to act out her own will once, before the prison confines her again. If she had wings, or were the wind, even then she says, "having touched you," she would return. She realizes that regardless of her hopes and dreams, her potential and capabilities, for most of her patriarchal and conservative society she will always be, just a girl. She opts for the word "girl" in this poem, and not woman, and that is significant. She is mentioning how her society systematically treats women as mere girls, regardless of age and experience, and how it denies these women agency and restricts their actions. There is an aspect of sexual desire in this poem as well, suggesting that the subject of the poem believes she is a woman, but also knows that in the eyes of her society she will never really be a woman, nor will she be free to act on her womanly desires.

The second poem follows a similar theme in which Shakir presents the existence of a woman as nothing more than a doll's, a plaything for those who mean to control the lives of women. Kishwar Naheed (b. 1940), the prominent feminist Urdu poet and Shakir's contemporary, said that: "Each man in the sub-continent wants a woman to

behave like a doll during the day and at night, like a prostitute."[439] Likewise, Shakir suggests that society treats women as if they were dolls, and it wants to control all of their actions. Just like a doll, a woman is not free to choose how she dresses herself. Women's dressing behavior and choices in Pakistan (and South Asia in general) are affected by society's expectations much more than individual men's. She will accept whatever she is told to wear without objections. Like a doll she can also be handed off to anyone, without regard to her opinion in the matter. This is how women must feel when they are set up in arranged marriages – something Parveen Shakir herself was familiar with – and are sent off to make a life with a complete stranger.

Shakir then moves on to comment on how women are restricted in their freedom of speech and expression. Though they are just as discerning and intelligent as men, their opinions do not hold the same weight in society. They can speak only when allowed to, and can easily by silenced if what they have to say is objectionable to those in power, whether *de jure* or *de facto*.[440] She ends with once more alluding to the state of marriage in her society and how men may disregard their wives at will. Women are not much more than decorative pieces, sitting in some niche in the wall, like dolls.[441]

In a hyper-patriarchal society like Pakistan's, male children are considered more worthy than female children. Boys are raised with a strict sense of responsibility towards

[439] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 130.
[440] A prime example of this was brought to the world's attention when on October 9, 2012 a gunman shot the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai because her advocacy of girls' education was objectionable to some, extra-judicial, yet powerful elements in Pakistan.
[441] Abdul Hakim and Azra Aziz. "Socio-cultural, Religious, and Political Aspects of the Status of Women in Pakistan." *The Pakistan Development Review*, 37, no. 4 (1998): 729. Within traditional marriage in Pakistan a woman is mostly responsible for bearing children, specifically boys; a husband is less concerned in the companionship of his wife.

preserving family honor, and hence are viewed as an asset to the family. Such an upbringing often results in aggressive behavior from men, and it also deters individuality.[442] Girls on the other hand are seen as temporary visitors in their parents' home because they will one day get married and belong to another family. And even though girls may be treated well at home they are never truly seen as an asset to the family.[443] Due to this, women's opinions and ideas are not equally valued in the Pakistani society at large, since from the very beginning male members of the family view female members as just girls, or women who need to be protected. They are not seen as people capable of taking care of themselves and making their own decisions.

In marriage, a woman is subject to her husband's authority, or of senior women in the new household, and can only establish herself as a valued member of the family once she has a child, especially a boy.[444] Such a cultural norm suggests that a woman's value is tied to her ability to reproduce, and not to her intellectual abilities and how she can contribute to society other than producing children.

The next poem addresses how the hostile working condition for women in Pakistan affect the day-to-day lives and outlook for an average workingwoman. Shakir portrays what a common workingwoman – a stenographer – must endure each day in order to make a living:

istēnogrāfar - Stenographer[445]

camkīlī ṣubaḥ sē pehlē

[442] Hakim and Aziz, "Socio-cultural, Religious, and Political Aspects," 729.
[443] Hakim and Aziz, "Socio-cultural, Religious, and Political Aspects," 729.
[444] Hakim and Aziz, "Socio-cultural, Religious, and Political Aspects," 729. Furthermore, if a woman does not bear any children, or only births daughters, it may result in the husband taking a second wife.
[445] Parveen Shakir, *Ṣadbarg*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*, 110-11.

jab nīnd badan mēṅ shehad kī ṣurat ghultī ho
aur ṣabā kē hāthoṅ girah har dard kī khultī ho
us vaqt-e-shafā
sab kaccē zaḳham badan kē
sab piyāsē sapnē tan kē
bēqīmat jān kē uṭhnā
ik hār sī mān kēuṭhnā
aur ḳhud ko mausam kī bēmehar havā kē havālē kar dēnā
din bhar bēma'nī hindsoṅ
aur bēmaqṣad nāmoṅ ko
bas ḳhālī żehan aur bēḥis hāth sē tā'ip kartē jānā
gāhē gāhē ḥasb-e-mauqa'
ganjē sar vālē bās kī mīṭhī aur kaṛvī bateṅ
aur patthar kī mūrat kī ṯaraḥ har lehjē par cup rehnā
phir shām ga'ē
jab ciṛyāṅ tak apnē ghar kī ho jā'ēṅ
daftar kī ḳhunak bhaṭṭī sē
jhulsā hū'ā cehrah lē kar
ṣadiyoṅ kī thakan sē dohrē
jhuktē hū'ē shānē thāmē
bhūkī āṅkhoṅ, jaltē faqroṅ, ghar tak choṛ ānē vālī
shā'istahkāroṅ sē bactī
ḍar ḍar kē qadam uṭhātī
ik istēnogrāfar
apnē ghar lauṭ ātī hai
aur ṭūṭī hū'ī dīvār ko thām kē shāyad roz hī kehtī hai
mālik!
ik din aisā bhī ā'
mirē sar par chat paṛ jā'ē!

Before the glittering morning
When sleep dissolves in the body like honey
And the morning breeze's hands unloose every knot of pain
At that time of healing
All raw wounds of the body,
All parched dreams of the person…
Waking up, considering them worthless
And surrendering oneself to the season's cruel wind
All day meaningless numbers
And purposeless names
To keep typing mindlessly and with aimless hands
Occasionally, as the need may demand
To tolerate the sweet and bitter words of the bald boss
And like a stone statue, remaining quiet at everything

Then late in the evening
When even the birds have returned to their nests
From the cold furnace of the office
Taking a scorched-like face
Bending from the tiredness of centuries
Holding up the drooping shoulders
Fearing hungry eyes, cat calls that escort her home,
Dodging those doers of courtesy
She takes a step
One stenographer
Returns to her home
And gripping a broken wall perhaps she says every day
Lord!
Such a day should come
I should have a roof over my head

Women are not represented proportionally in most sectors of the economy in Pakistan. From 1984-1988 women's presence in Pakistan's labor force increased from 15.5 to 18.3 percent. Most of this increase came in the fields of teaching and medicine. In 1988 one-third of the teachers, and one-fifth of all doctors in Pakistan were women.[446] However, the representation of women remains strikingly low in white-collar office jobs. In 1988, the share of women in clerical jobs was at a meager 2.9 percent.[447]

Most of the representation of women in the workforce is either in the top professions by women from upper classes who get university and professional education, or in the bottom sectors. The bottom sectors are filled with women from lower socio-economic classes, with lower levels of education, who enter the job market due to dire

[446] Shahnaz Kazi, Bilquees Raza, and Ann Duncan. "Duality of Female Employment in Pakistan." *The Pakistan Development Review*, 30, no. 4 (1991): 733-34. The reason for the larger representation in these fields is due to the segregated nature of society. Women teachers and doctors are needed to work with women who are not able to attend a classroom led by a male teacher, or be examined by a male doctor. There have been some gains made in the number of women in banking, engineering, and law, but the numbers remain much lower than of those in education and medicine.
[447] Kazi, Raza, and Duncan, "Duality of Female Employment." 733-34. Though small, this percentage represents nearly a hundred percent increase from 1984.

financial need. Because of their lower education and lack of professional skills many of these women take on unskilled jobs. These women are exploited as cheap source of labor and businesses keep them in jobs with no benefits or security.[448]

The low representation of women in Pakistan's workforce can largely be attributed to the supply side of the labor force equation. Women in Pakistan often have cultural restrictions that preclude them from entering the labor force. Women are also kept out of the labor market due to lack of education and the burden of household responsibilities.[449] Furthermore, there are many everyday realities that make being a workingwoman a difficult undertaking for many in Pakistan. These can range from the lack of safety while using public transportation, to workplace harassment. According to several human rights reports, women in Pakistan who work secretarial jobs in offices, or are domestic workers in semi-skilled and unskilled positions, are targets of sexual harassment on a regular basis.[450]

Jasmin Mirza informs us that any significant increase of women in the labor force is due to state of the economy in which inflation high. With many men unable to provide adequately for their families more and more lower-middle-class women have had to enter the labor market.[451] Women working in offices are also now routinely subjected to various forms of harassment and inappropriate behavior. Male co-workers often pass by

[448] Kazi, Raza, and Duncan, "Duality of Female Employment." 739.
[449] Kazi, Raza, and Duncan, "Duality of Female Employment." 737-38. Even at the primary education level the dropout rate for girls is 50 – 60 percent. The enrollment rates of women drop significantly compared to men at each higher level of education.
[450] Fahd Ali Raza. "Reasons for the Lack of Women's Participation in Pakistan's Workforce." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 3, no. 3 (2007): 101-02.
[451] Jasmin Mirza. "Accommodating "Purdah" to the Workplace: Gender Relations in the Office Sector in Pakistan," *The Pakistan Development Review*, 38, no. 2 (1999). 188-89. It is also worth noting that among the lower-middle-class in Pakistan – which is the most purdah observing – female employment is considered a disgrace because women have to associate with men.

really close, or touch them, while trying to reach over them to pick up office supplies. Crude jokes being exchanged by men within earshot of women is also not an uncommon occurrence. Female office workers are not only the target of harassment by their co-workers, but clients and visitors to the offices also engage in various forms of harassment, and are in fact some of the worst offenders. After having met the women in the offices clients often call them over the phone and ask them to meet for lunch or coffee.[452]

In this poem Parveen Shakir represents women like these who have to face such daily challenges in order to make a living. Even though Shakir was a professional, middle-class woman, she shows that she understood the struggles of the average workingwoman in Pakistan. She can sympathize with the fact that many of these women are in dire financial need for work, and hence tolerate the abuse of sexual harassment at work. The stenographer in this poem has no hope of finding fulfillment through a professional career like Parveen Shakir's. She wakes up each morning to a harsh reality in which she has to face the mundane drudgery of her daily work. Furthermore, not only does she have to face a hostile work environment, even her commute is rife with sexual harassment. Leaving work at the end of the day also does not bring relief, but instead becomes cause for more anxiety. She dreads the walk, or commute home, because she is subjected to catcalls and the male gaze all the way home. She is also perhaps subjected to ill intentions masked in good manners...by those doers of courtesy.

[452] Mirza, "Accommodating "Purdah," 191-92.

It is interesting to note that in one verse Shakir describes this workingwoman like a stone statue or an idol. From a Hindu standpoint, or the ghazal one for that matter, the idol stands for god, and the poets have frequently joked that stones are turned into beloveds-gods due to the devotion they receive from their lovers. In Shakir's world the idol itself has no agency and no actual worth. In the Islamic context the idol would represent the image of false-gods, worthy of being broken and trod upon, as some Muslims did at the Ka'ba after the conquest of Mecca in 630 C.E. Shakir, like these gods, is burdened with being the representation of honor for her community, and yet she is also seen as near worthless, someone who can be trampled upon. Furthermore, when she talks about the stenographer being tired, she does not simply state that the woman is tired due to her work; instead, she is "bending from the tiredness of centuries." Shakir, as a woman, is well aware of the injustices and discrimination women have faced throughout history; she brings attention to those injustices here as well.

According to Jasmin Mirza, with more and more women entering the workforce, women in Pakistan have had to come up with ways to deal with hostile work environments; they do so by employing different strategies to reduce the chances of becoming targets of harassment. Women often create social distance by not engaging in any conversations with men that do not relate to work. They also do not engage in friendly exchanges with men if they see them outside of work.[453] A second strategy used by workingwomen is to develop social, and social-obligatory relationships with male

[453] Mirza, "Accommodating "Purdah," 193.

colleagues, by developing relationships with the male co-workers' families.[454] Men are less inclined to behave inappropriately with the women if they know that these women have formed some sort of a relationship with their families. Women tackle the issue of accidental physical touch by creating segregated women's spaces. They create workspaces in which there is sufficient space and no threat of physical closeness. However, not all women have access to such spaces; those women that have limitations of space arrange their desks so that they are not facing their male colleagues while working. If their physical space allows for it they sit in separate rooms, or behind partitions.[455] Another way women try to create some distance between themselves and the men is by using kinship terms to address them and making them part of their fictive kinship system.[456]

Farida Faisal explains that public sector work in Pakistan, the kind Parveen Shakir did as a Customs Officer, is generally considered a better work environment for women than private sector. There is much more job security, better maternity leave, and in general, fewer working hours, and less stress.[457] However, according to the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) in its 2003 report on the Status of Women's Employment in Public Sector Organizations, women in the public sector also

[454] Mirza, "Accommodating "Purdah," 195.
[455] Mirza, "Accommodating "Purdah," 197-98.
[456] Mirza, "Accommodating "Purdah," 196. Although this is a less frequently used strategy because using such terms does not necessarily result in the male co-worker abiding by the social obligations that come with such kinship.
[457] Farida Faisal, "Measuring Perceptions of Work Environment Among Educated Female Public Servants in Pakistan." *Pakistan Economic and Social Review*, 48, no. 1 (2010): 135.

face harassment.[458] However, women working in the public sector do not view their work environment as extremely hostile overall, and are mostly satisfied with equal access to professional development among genders, informs Farida Faisal.[459] Interestingly however, whereas in the private sector women tend to bond and work closely with each other, in the public sector women seem to have better working relationships with their male colleagues and bosses, displaying the phenomenon of horizontal hostility.[460]

Workingwoman is a poem about a woman who for all intents and purposes is an independent, self-made woman, yet even she must feel the need to succumb to pressures of a patriarchal society from time to time:

Workingwoman[461]

sab kehtē haiṅ
kaisē ġhurūr kī bāt hū'ī hai
mēṅ apnī haryālī ko ḳhud apnē lahū sē sīṅc rahī hūṅ
mērē sārē pattoṅ kī shādābī
mērī apnī nēk kamā'ī hai
mērē ēk shagūfē par bhī
kisī havā aur kisī bārish kā bāl barābar qarẓ nahīṅ hai
mēṅ jab cāhūṅ khil saktī hūṅ
mērā sārā rūp, mirī apnī daryāft hai
mēṅ ab har mausam sē sar ūṅcā kar kē mil saktī hūṅ
ēk tanāvar pēṛ hūṅ ab mēṅ
aur apnī zarḳhēz numū kē sārē imkānāt ko bhī pehcān rahī hūṅ
lēkin mērē andar kī yah bohat purānī bēl
kabhī kabhī ___ jab tēz havā ho
kisī bohat maẓbūṯ shajar kē tan sē lipaṭnā cāhtī hai!

[458] Faisal, "Measuring Perceptions of Work," 140-41. Many essential needs of women like access to daycare and separate women's restrooms are often ignored. The harassment that women face in the public sector is primarily from outsiders (clients) and not from their co-workers (p. 160).
[459] Faisal, "Measuring Perceptions of Work," 152-54.
[460] Faisal, "Measuring Perceptions of Work," 154. "Horizontal Hostility is a socio-psychological theory which posits that members of the same oppressed groups (e.g. women) place obstacles and limitations on each others' progress instead of collaborating with each other to fight differential forces that are oppressing them (e.g. patriarchal structures). Women in the private sector in Pakistan seem to display Social Homophily since they prefer the company of their own group.
[461] Parveen Shakir, *Ṣadbarg*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*, 113-14.

Everyone says
What a thing of pride it is
I am watering my verdant future with my own efforts
The radiance of all my leaves
Is due to my own hard-earned accomplishments
Not even on one of my blooms
Is there a debt of some wind and rain
I can blossom whenever I want
I am my own creation
I can now face any season with my head held high
I am now a strong tree
And I recognize all the possibilities of my fertile growth
But this very old vine within me
Sometimes – when there is a strong wind
Desires to wrap itself around a solid tree

The speaker in this poem is a strong, independent workingwoman. She does not owe her prosperity to anyone; she has made her life through her own efforts. She is not indebted to anyone and can confidently face anyone as his or her equal. However, the speaker adds, that sometimes when there is a strong wind the old vine within her seeks to wrap itself around a strong tree. This maybe read as Shakir's commentary on the patriarchy that women simply cannot escape in Pakistan. Although it is not clear that the strong tree that the vine desires to wrap itself around is a male figure, we cannot dismiss it.

The topic that Shakir addresses in the next poem is that of arranged marriage. She herself was not a stranger to the negative effects of arranged marriage since her marriage to her cousin quickly started showing signs of trouble and ended in a divorce:

ēk udās naẕm - A Sad Poem[462]

[462] Parveen Shakir, *Ṣadbarg*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*, 259.

ēk ṯaraf suhāg hai
aur dūsrī ṯaraf
rūḥ ko jalānē vālī āg hai
ḳhud peh baraf girtē dēkhtī rahūṅ
keh raushnī kā hāth thām lūṅ
ai ḳhudā'ē āb-o-nār
mērā faiṣlah sunā
zindah dafan hūṅ
keh zindagī kā hāth thām lūṅ?

On one side matrimony
And on the other side
Is the soul-purifying fire
Should I keep watching the snow falling on me
Or grab the hand of light
O' Lord of water and fire
Give me my verdict
Should I be buried alive
Or grab the hand of Life

Like Akhtar Shirani, who viewed arranged marriage as anathema to happiness, Parveen Shakir also feels that the nature of matrimony in her culture is not conducive to fulfillment of love and happiness. In this poem she presents the dichotomy between a life of matrimony and an unwedded life in Pakistan. The former is akin to being buried alive, whereas the latter guarantees life, though not an easy one. Life out of matrimony is like a soul-purifying fire. Although it allows the speaker in this poem a chance to remain true to herself, she must face a society that presents many hardships for unwed women.

The speaker entreats God to make the decision. Imploring God to make the decision is an interesting choice by Shakir because she understands that many of the cultural norms that are restrictive, and discriminatory against women, are justified using religion. The reader is forced to acknowledge that the God who is hearing these pleas is

allowing women to endure injustice that takes away their freedom of self-actualization. Shakir also points out that women do not have control in these matters in her society.

The following *ghazal* is a good example of the tone of both romance and resistance in Parveen Shakir's poetry. On the one hand the speaker in this poem sets herself up as a pining lover, following the traditional trope of the genre, and yet she also breaks from tradition by demanding respect from the beloved.[463]

ġhazal[464]

ik na ik roz to ruḳhṣat kartā
mujh sē kitnī hī muhabbat kartā

sab rutēṅ ā kē calī jātī haiṅ
mausam-e-ġham bhī to hijrat kartā

bhēṛyē mujh ko kahāṅ pā saktē
voh agar mērī ḥifāẕat kartā

mērē lehjē mēṅ ġhurūr āyā thā
us ko ḥaq thā keh shikāyat kartā

kuch to thī mērī ḳhatā, varnah voh kyūṅ
is ṯaraḥ tark-e-rifāqat kartā

aur us sē nah rahī ko'ī ṯalab
bas mirē pyār kī 'izat kartā

One day he would have had to bid me farewell
No matter how much he loved me

All seasons depart after they arrive
The season of sorrow should have also migrated

[463] The language in this poem is not gender specific as far as the beloved is concerned, who could be either male or female. However, certain words that the beloved uses to describe her situation make it possible to read this poem in a female voice. For instance, in the cultural context it is the woman who would need protection from the "wolves" or men who want to take advantage of a woman they perceive as weak. The lover on the other hand is positively marked as masculine.
[464] Parveen Shakir, *Khudkalāmī*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*, Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1999, 27-28.

How could wolves devour me
Had he protected me

Pride did come across in my tone
It was his right to complain

Some of it was my fault, or why would he
Break off association in this way

I did not ask anything of him. Except:
That he should have respected my love

Like a traditional lover in the *ghazal,* speaking about the beloved, she understands that the beloved's love and attention are fleeting; she knows that the beloved would have to bid her farewell eventually. She professes the loss she feels over the unrequited love. This feeling of loss does not subside over time. This is representative of a traditional way of existence for a woman in South Asia, where society makes it much easier for a man to move on and make a new life, with a new partner. It is, however, quite difficult for a woman to have ample choice of suitors after a divorce, or widowhood. So much of a woman's identity in Pakistan is tied to being a wife that the loss of this position is also the loss of much of her status and dignity in the eyes of society. A husband is the one who provides protection to the wife, and her worth is determined by whether she can provide sons or not. That is probably why the lover proclaims the she would have escaped the wolves, had her beloved – perhaps husband – protected her, and kept her safe from the ravenous society.

The speaker then breaks from the traditional role of both the lover and a woman challenging the inequality between sexes. She admits to her part in the quarrel by saying

that *some* of it was indeed her fault, but she also puts much of the blame on the beloved. She says that she had but one demand of the beloved, that he should have respected her love. This is definitely a representation of a strong feminist point of view since she demands respect from the beloved—we do not find this trope frequently in the *ghazal* tradition. In most South Asian marriages a wife is generally not in a position to demand such equality and respect; however, the lover in this poem does exactly that, perhaps to the detriment of her relationship. Knowing Parveen Shakir's marital history we can read some autobiographical subtext into this poem as well. After all, Shakir was an independent woman, and a celebrated poet, who refused to acquiesce to the demands of her mother-in-law and husband, those who wanted her to stay at home, and be a dutiful wife.

Much like Shakir, the speaker in this poem also demands similar respect. If her beloved had only respected her love, and seen her as an equal partner, perhaps the relationship would have stood a better chance. Hence, even though the lover in this poem resembles, and sounds like a traditional lover of the *ghazal* in many ways, she is also resisting the traditional role set out for the lover. She does so by being a lover who is most probably a woman, and talking about her love and relationship with a man openly – another societal taboo. She closes by claiming a position that gives women the right to demand respect.

In this next poem Shakir uses the *ghazal* genre to lament the sad state of society. The tone she sets is one of desperation, where all hope is lost. The genre of love poetry is an interesting choice because it is one that is used frequently to discuss not just love, but

also the loss of all hope and desires. She is a poet who sees her city, and the society that she loves in chaos, where people have lost hope and have lost the motivation to make things better.

ġhazal[465]

ik lamḥah to patthar bhī ḳhūṅ ro jā'ē
jab ḳhavāboṅ kā sonā miṭṭī ho jā'ē

ik aisī bārish ho mērē shehar peh jo
sārē dil aur sārē darīcē dho jā'ē

pehrah dētē rehtē haiṅ jab tak ḳhadshaē
kaisē rāt kē sāth ko'ī phir so jā'ē

bārish aur numū to us kē hāth mēṅ haiṅ
miṭṭī mēṅ par bīj to ko'ī bo jā'ē

tīn rutoṅ tak māṅ jis ka rastah dēkhē
voh baccah cauthē mausam mēṅ kho jā'ē

Even a stone may shed tears of blood for a moment
When the gold of dreams turns to dust

May such a rain shower upon my city that
All hearts and all windows are washed for once

While apprehension remains the guardian
How can someone sleep with the night?

Rain and growth are in His hands
But someone has to sew the seeds in dirt

For three seasons, for whom the mother waits
That child is lost in the fourth season

The poet sees that her city is suffering and realizes that the inhabitants of the city are themselves to blame. Even a stone may shed tears of blood, but the people that she is

[465] Parveen Shakir, *Khudkalāmī*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*, 41.

referring to have hearts harder than stones, that do not feel any sympathy towards their fellow citizens. She prays for a rain, that would wash away the dirt from the city, some intervention that can wash away evil from hearts of men. There is no rest for her fellow citizens in the chaos of her society, no room to dream for a better future, until the guardians that are the ones causing pain and suffering are transformed. Shakir is most likely making the political and religious establishments the targets of her accusations. How can there be any peace, and how can anyone sleep peacefully till those who are supposed to protect are the ones causing the chaos?

The second to last couplet seems to be not only a call to action, but also a challenge in response to Islamization. God and religion are not the answers to the ills of society, like the political establishment would have the citizens believe. In the spirit of Iqbal, people themselves have to try to make their lives better; someone has to sew the seeds in the dirt. This couplet of hers is representative of the times, since there were groups like the Women's Action Forum (WAF), which were engaged in organized resistance against Islamization policies.[466]

[466] The Women's Action Forum and its role in challenging discriminatory Islamic laws in Pakistan is discussed in the next chapter.

The difficult "question," or issue that Shakir addresses in the next poem is that of child labor, which is a common sight in every city and village of Pakistan and throughout Sout Asia. As a progressive poet, woman, and a mother, Shakir takes on the issue:

ēk mushkil savāl - A difficult question[467]

ṭāṭ kē pardoṅ kē pīchē sē
ēk bārah tērah sālah cehrah jhāṅkā
voh cehrah
bahār kē phelē phūl kī ṯaraḥ tāzah thā
aur āṅkhēṅ
pehlī muhabbat kī ṯaraḥ shaffāf!
lēkin us kē hāth mēṅ
tarkārī kāṭtē rehnē kī lakīrēṅ thīṅ
aur un lakīroṅ mēṅ
bartan māṅjhnē vālī rākh jamī thī
us kē hāth
us kē cehrē sē bīs sāl baṛē thē!

From behind the canvas curtains
A thirteen or fourteen-year-old face peeked
That face
Was fresh like the first blossom of spring
And eyes
Transparent like first love
But in her hands
Were lines from chopping vegetables
And in those lines
Were congealed ashes from washing pots
Her hands
Were aged twenty years more than her face!

Child labor is a global issue, with over 246 million children working worldwide, and it does not have any simple solutions. Many economists caution against banning

[467] Parveen Shakir, *Inkār*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*, Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1999, 165-66.

child labor completely.[468] Ranjan Ray explains that as universal ban on the practice can have negative effects on poor families that depend on the wages of their children in order to survive.[469] Those who caution against complete ban of child labor also point out that child labor is a symptom of other underlying problems such as "poverty, inadequate education systems, discrimination within families, ethnic conflicts, inadequately protected human rights, [and] weak democratic institutions."[470] Until these problems are addressed banning child labor will not produce the expected results. Given the lack of investment in education by corrupt governments, children who cannot work will not necessarily be in a school.[471] However, Debra Satz informs that the supporters of total banning of child labor argue that if child labor were outlawed it would result in increased wages for adults, making child labor irrelevant for the survival of families.[472] They also argue that child labor means less education for children, which eventually results in an adult population that is not very competitive and productive, and which will not earn adequate wages in the long run.[473]

Rana Ejaz Ali Khan shows how the prevalent the practice of child labor is in Pakistan. According to the Child Labor Survey, in 1996 there were 3.3 million child laborers in Pakistan between the ages of 5-15, which translates to 8.3 percent of the

[468] Debra Satz, "Child Labor: A Normative Perspective." *The World Bank Economic Review*, 17, no. 2 (2003): 297. Furthermore, a uniform ban misses the point that different countries define the ages of childhood differently (p. 298).
[469] Ranjan Ray, "Child Labor, Child Schooling, and Their Interaction with Adult Labor: Empirical Evidence for Peru and Pakistan." *The World Bank Economic Review*, 14, no. 2, (2000): 365.
[470] Satz, "Child Labor: A Normative," 303.
[471] Satz, "Child Labor: A Normative," 304. In some poor countries children have to work in order to pay their school tuition. Hence stopping them from working also takes them out of school. The target of bans should be the work that is most harmful to children, such as debt bondage, prostitution, pornography and child soldiering.
[472] Satz, "Child Labor: A Normative," 303.
[473] Satz, "Child Labor: A Normative," 304.

children in the country.[474] According to Jafri and Raishad, as an easily exploited labor force, children often work longer than normal hours, ranging from thirty to fifty hours per week.[475] Boys who work outnumber girls about five to one in urban areas, whereas in rural areas the number of male child laborers is twice as much as the girls.[476] The increase of girls in the child labor force however is on a faster pace than boys.[477]

The reason for the faster growth of female child laborers can be attributed to several factors, but the main reason is of the societal views on the economic worth of female children. Whereas some boys who work can simultaneously continue their education, girls are less likely to work and attend school at the same time. Logistical reasons that hinder the education of girls include the lack of girls-only schools, and also the shortage of qualified female teachers - both of which become a necessity in a conservative Islamic society, which practices the seclusion of women. Given limited resources, many families prefer to send their boys to school, instead of girls, since it is considered less advantageous to educate girls. Such attitudes are even more prevalent in rural areas of the country where girls have even less opportunity to receive education, compared to their urban sisters.[478] This bias against educating girls perpetuates the problem of child labor even further. Women who have had little education cannot contribute adequately to the household income after starting families. Such families rely

[474] Rana Ejaz Ali Khan. "Children in Different Activities: Child Schooling and Child Labor." *The Pakistan Development Review*, 42, no. 2, (2003): 146.
[475] S.M. Younus Jafri and S.M. Younus Raishad. "Some Dimensions of Child Labour in Pakistan." *The Pakistan Development Review*, 36, no. 1, (1997): 75.
[476] Jafri and Raishad, "Some Dimensions of Child Labour," 70.
[477] Jafri and Raishad, "Some Dimensions of Child Labour," 76.
[478] Khan. "Children in Different Activities ," 146-47.

more on the income earned by the children in the household than those in which women are able to contribute.[479]

Shakir places the child behind a canvas curtain in the beginning of the poem, which is quite representative of the child labor problem that people do not seem to notice, even though it is all around them. The child peeks through that curtain at the world beyond, but she can only look; she cannot come out of this place. People must notice her and care about her predicament, which is a stain on society, only then can she come out from behind this curtain. The curtain can symbolize many things; it can be society's acceptance of child labor, or the dismissive attitude about the harmful effects of the practice. The curtain can symbolize barriers the child laborer will eventually face in succeeding as an adult, due to the lack of education, or the system that denies them their childhood experiences. Shakir describes her eyes as transparent as first love. A love that is supposed to instill hope and make any hardships and struggles bearable. Her hands however tell a different story. Her hands are not of a child; they have experience beyond her years. She has been cleaning pots for years; her hands do the dirty work of society. She has been chopping vegetables and society has been feeding off of her labor. She is an exploited member of society and that is why she is kept behind the curtain.

Looking at this poem in the broader context of what creates the environment in which child labor exists, this poem is more than just an indictment of child labor. By

[479] Ray, "Child Labor, Child Schooling," 353.
- Ray, "Child Labor, Child Schooling," 356. On the other hand rising wages of women does not necessarily translate into less working hours for children. In fact many working mothers have to put their children to work as well since there is a lack of schools and daycare in the country.
- Ray, "Child Labor, Child Schooling," 361. Girls are affected even more because working mothers will pull their daughter out of school and take them to work.

taking on this issue Shakir targets not just the practice of child labor, but also the society that creates an environment in which the practice takes place. She is also indirectly challenging the political establishment on its corruption, and its failure to protect the most vulnerable of the country's citizens. And as the title of the poem suggests, Shakir views the issue of child labor as a difficult question that the country must address. People have to question what causes lie underneath, that make child labor such a common practice in Pakistan; and why does Pakistani society seem so accepting of it? However, the solution to this practice does not seem to have an easy answer. In one estimate it is believed that if child labor were to be completely banned, about 3 percent of Pakistani households would be subjected to live in poverty. Furthermore, a complete ban also poses the danger of moving child labor from the formal sector to the informal sector. A shift of all child labor to the informal sector would mean that there would be no scrutiny, and it would make protecting the children from the worst effects of the practice even more difficult.[480]

Students of Urdu literature cannot miss the resonance of the great nineteenth century populist poet Nazir Akbarabadi (1735-1830) in the language of Shakir's poems that engage the workplace, market, and marginalization. As the late Aditya Behl points out,

> It is a commonplace that Nazir's verses are expressive of the feel of everyday life, its texture, its material culture and objects, its structures of emotion, exchanges, and ideation. Yet, he does not describe that material culture directly or straightforwardly. Nazir expresses an emotional relationship with it, making the material world the subject of the poem but seeing it through a poetic filter. Thus, in his poem on the fan ('*Pankhā*') he elucidates how the glittering object is part of

[480] Ray, "Child Labor, Child Schooling," 365. One must acknowledge that labor deprives children of their childhood and robs them of their youth. A girl who has never been allowed to be a child is unlikely to grow into a self-fulfilled woman, or to even understand what she wants or lacks.

wider networks of exchange, desire, and craftsmanship. The fan is the jealous poet's rival, closer to the beloved than Nazir can ever hopt to get.[481]

Nazir did not make it into the literary histories as prominently as he should have since the historians did not know where to place him—he talked about his own life, his earth and the objects that grace it, in nuanced ways that did not sit well with those used to reading traditional *ghazals*. Shakir, similarly, is not easy to accept as a progressive feminist voice for she is a woman but is not speaking of feminism according to the dominant script of the movement in Pakistan.

In the last poem of this selection Shakir once again employs the *ghazal* genre to address the violence that her city, Karachi, faced. Shakir grew up in Karachi, went to school, and even worked in Karachi for a number of years, and was a witness to horrific violence in the city that she loved. She uses a powerful metaphorical voice to lament the state of affairs in her city:

ġhazal[482]

sulag rahā hai mirā shehar, jal rahī hai havā
yah kaisī āg hai jis mēṅ pighal rahī hai havā

yah kaun bāġh mēṅ ḳhanjar badast phirtā hai
yah kis kē ḳhauf sē cehrah badal rahī hai havā

sharīk ho ga'ī sāzish mēṅ kis kē kehnē par
yah kis kē qatal peh ab hāth mal rahī hai havā

parindē sehmē hū'ē haiṅ daraḳht ḳhauf zadah
yah kis irādē sē ghar sē nikal rahī hai havā

[481] Aditya Behl, "Poet of the Bazars: Nazir Akbarabadi, 1735-1830," in Kathryn Hansen and David Lelyveld (eds.), 192-222 *A Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspective*, 201. (The article is from p. 192-222)
[482] Parveen Shakir, *Kaf-e-Ā'īnah*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*, Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1999, 73.

My city is kindling, the wind is burning
What kind of fire is this in which the wind is melting?

Who is this who strolls in the garden brandishing a dagger?
From whose fear is the wind changing direction?

On whose order did it join in the conspiracy?
On whose murder is the wind rubbing its hands?

The birds are cowering and the trees are terrified,
With what intention is the wind leaving the house?

Appearing in the volume that was published posthumously, two years after her death, this *ghazal* addresses the violence in Karachi. Parveen Shakir spent most of her life in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, one that had seen its share of ethnic violence spanning over more than decade. Ethnic violence from the mid-1980s to the turn of the millennium was commonplace as the *Muttahida Qaumi Movement* (MQM) political party fought both the state and rival factions for control of Karachi. Additionally, the sectarian differences also marred the city's peace.[483]

Akmal Hussain explains that since the late 1970s there had been an influx of refugees moving to Pakistan in order to flee the violence that accompanied the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As Pakistan was the conduit through which Afghans were delivered weapons, the war in Afghanistan, fed by the weapons of the United States and the Soviet Union, resulted in the proliferation of weapons into Pakistan. This aided in the

[483] Nichola Khan, "Mobilisation and Political Violence in the Mohajir Community." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42, no. 25, (2007): 2435. MQM is a secular political party, which has its roots in the Muhajir community. The party was known as the *Muhajir Qaumi Movement* till 1997 before changing its name to Muttahida Qaumi Movement, to be more inclusive.

emergence of illegal arms and heroin trade, in which the Afghans had a share.[484] In this way the Pathans, one of the major ethnic groups of Northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan, were seen as the face of these illicit activities. Pathans also drew the ire of Karachi residents because of the accidents and deaths that occurred frequently at the hands of Pathan minibus drivers.[485]

In December 1986, ethnic riots erupted between the Pathans and the Muhajirs. For two days there was rampant killing on the streets by men armed with machine guns, after which a curfew was imposed. However, rioters defied the curfew, and the violence continued.[486] The immediate cause of the violence was the launch of a state operation to clean up the Sohrab Goth locality where Pathan migrants lived as squatters, and stored illegal drugs and weapons. The security forces razed their homes and forced them to move to another locality. The Pathans retaliated against the Muhajirs because they believed that the Muhajirs had conspired with the police against them.[487]

Akmal Hussain further elaborates and explains that although the immediate cause of the violence was the raid, in fact Karachi had been a powder keg ready to explode for some time. The rapid increase in population, coupled with the lack of basic services, and

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[484] Akmal Hussain, "Karachi Riots of December 1986: Crisis of State and Civil Society in Pakistan," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22, no. 11 (1987): 451.

[485] Hussain, "Karachi Riots," 451. Many poor Pathans leased minibuses and because of the pressure of making enough money quickly in order to make payments they would drive recklessly so as to pick up more passengers. The accidents were usually followed by a riot and killing of the driver. The demand by MQM, that the state take forceful measures against the transporters created further tension between the Pathans and Muhajir ethnic groups.

[486] Hussain, "Karachi Riots," 450. Muhajirs were the migrants from India at the time of Partition in 1947; and later Bihari immigrants from Bangladesh.

[487] Hussain, "Karachi Riots," 451. The raid did not recover any significant caches of drugs or weapons because the smugglers had been tipped off about it. In other operation the security forces also raided Muhajir homes in Orangi Township and found and confiscated homemade bombs.

income equality had polarized the different groups competing for resources.[488] With such conditions of distrust and animosity, in which different groups of people blamed each other for the deterioration of their living conditions and lack of access to basic services, it was easy for political and criminal groups to manipulate people, and nudge them towards violence.

With the state's inability to provide security, or basic services to people, the MQM took advantage of the situation to further its political agenda. According to Nichola Khan, during the Karachi conflict (1984-2002) the MQM regularly recruited young males and trained them to be political killers.[489] Young men who were disenchanted with poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and suffered the humiliation of being brutalized at the hands of security forces were prime targets of such manipulation.[490] Through their political killings, as militants for MQM, these men experienced a form of "hypermasculinity that glorifies killing and asserts the right for *men* [emphasis mine] to terrorize and violate people in order to dominate and survive during the conflict."[491]

The resulting violence that stems from such "hypermasculinity" does not only target other militant men. Women are especially affected by this violence when they are targeted in order to send a message to their husbands. In one such incident, reports Nichola Khan, a young militant went to a police superintendent's house and killed his pregnant wife. Not only did he stab her in the belly, killing her, but he also cut off her

[488] Hussain, "Karachi Riots," 452.
[489] Khan, "Mobilisation and Political Violence," 2435.
[490] Khan, "Mobilisation and Political Violence," 2436. Many of these men had also faced violence at home at the hands of their fathers.
[491] Khan, "Mobilisation and Political Violence," 2437.

head and placed it on top of the refrigerator. The killer went to such an extent as to defile the pregnant woman's body not only to scare his enemies, but also in order to undermine the male honor of this particular enemy.[492] This shows that the ethnic violence in Karachi was not limited to just men killing men. Women too were unable to escape the brutality, especially since women bore the burden of being the symbol of a family's, and a man's honor.[493] Considering the nature of Pakistani society, in which women are dependent on men to large extent for both physical and economic wellbeing, one can see how even the killing of other men would have a considerable negative effect on women.

Bhavna Mehta and Trupati Shah conducted a study in 1991 in Baroda city, India, to examine the effects of communal riots and found that such violence affects women in myriad ways even though they are not the ones directly involved in the violence. Baroda city had been affected by communal disturbances since the 1980s. In September 1990 heavy rioting took place during a Ganesh Visarjan procession, which resulted in ten-month long tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities.[494] Since violence on the streets makes leaving the home dangerous it causes disturbance in the day-to-day management of households, and even loss of income. As women are the ones responsible for running the households, many of the participants in the study complained about not being able to venture out to buy groceries. They reported that if they did overcome some

[492] Khan, "Mobilisation and Political Violence," 2440.
[493] This was just the logic by which the Taliban massacred around140 children in Peshawar on December 16, 2014, since many were the children of the Taliban's enemy, the army.

[494] Bhavna Mehta and Trupati Shah, "Gender and Communal Riots," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27, no. 47 (1992): 2523.

fear and ventured out to buy essential items they had to go to far off shops in order to avoid the violence in their community.[495]

Since many women earn incomes through informal employment, like tutoring children at home, or doing embroidery work, they are unable to have clients come to give them work. Women also deal with regular anxiety because they worry about their husbands. Mehta and Shah report that some women reported having adverse health effects such as, "diarrhea, high blood pressure, palpitations, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, shivering, and vomiting" caused by the fear of daily violence, and being socially cut off. Some women had to venture out because they were the sole providers for the family. They were more stressed about their earnings and being able to provide for their families rather than the danger to their lives.[496] Women reported feeling helpless for the most part; though they hated the violence, they recognized they were unable to prevent the men from engaging in it.[497]

Culturally speaking, the women of India and Pakistan share similar roles, responsibilities, and share the same obstacles when it comes maneuvering their way through their social milieus. Therefore we can apply the results of this study to the case of Karachi violence, about which Parveen Shakir writes. By addressing the issue of communal violence in the city, she is giving voice to the anxieties of those women who are the silent sufferers.

[495] Mehta and Shah, "Gender and Communal Riots," 2523.
[496] Mehta and Shah, "Gender and Communal Riots," 2523.
[497] Mehta and Shah, "Gender and Communal Riots," 2524.

The metaphor of the wind is a very poignant one, because it helps us imagine the ease with which the violent elements move throughout the city. No one is protected when the wind blows; it targets and affects everyone equally. Similarly, men, women, and children are all affected by this savage and brutal wind, and no one is safe. This is the kind of wind of which even the birds are afraid. In normal circumstances a bird would stretch out its wings and soar with the help of the wind, but these are not normal circumstances. If the wind represented a just government and rule of law, perhaps the citizens would not be terrified of it. However, in this city the government is corrupt and a destructive force which the people cannot count on for protection.

A deeper contextual look at this *ghazal* would also show that it is not merely about the violence in the city. Shakir is commenting on the state of affairs, which has allowed the environment of communal animosity, and has left room for various groups to bring violence to the streets. She is also calling out the state for not being able to protect its citizens, all of whom who are affected by the violence, but especially women and children. She asks on whose order is this violence happening? The state is impotent when it comes to stopping the killings. Shakir is shaming the government because it is unable to bring order to the streets and protect the lives of the innocent. In fact, the government is even implicit in the killings because of its heavy-handedness and the paramilitary forces it also brings to the streets of Karachi. The violence of the state is mirrored by the other factions as each tries to out-do the other. In the meantime, the innocent people suffer, especially the women, who are helpless, both inside and outside their homes.

IV. C.M. Naim's Reception of Parveen Shakir

C.M. Naim, the distinguished Urdu scholar and critic, appreciates the poetry as well as prose of Shakir by translating an excerpt from the introduction of her first book:

> On the crumbling threshold of fleet-footed moments, holding on to the arms of the wind, a girl stands and wonders: what should she tell you? Years ago, in the still hours of some night, she had prayed to God that He should reveal to her the girl inside her. I am sure God must have smiled, at least once, at the simplicity of that prayer—girls of tender age don't know that no greater calamity befalls those who dwell on earth than self-knowledge—but He granted her the request. And so, at an age when others wish for the moon, she received the magic word that would let her into the thousand-gated city of the Self.[498]

Professor Naim proceeds to differentiate Shakir and those women who wrote in her style from even the Progressive male poets of Urdu:

> Further, the new women poets, including Shakir, have written on a range of experiences within marital love which no male poet ever wrote about in Urdu. Sexual intimacy, pregnancy, childbirth, infidelity, separation and divorce—these are topics that one would look for in vain in the books of contemporary male poets, not to mention their predecessors. To give one example, only due to these women poets do we now have some fine poems on the experience of being a mother; sad to say, no male poet has yet written in Urdu a poem about being a father. (There are, of course, any number of hortatory poems by male poets addressed to "sons.")[499]

Within the male establishment of Urdu literature, and in some women's circles, Shakir's name frequently evokes applause for her physical looks. When she recited her poetry in literary assemblies, it eclipsed the presence of most others—she had the style, grace, and command over the Perso-Urdu idoms, and brilliance in a combination that is simply extraordinary. According to Akbar Hyder, "an obsession with Parvin Shakir's looks has

[498] C.M. Naim, "Parvin Shakir: A Note and Twelve Poems," in *The Annual of Urdu Studies,* 8, (1993): 170.
[499] Naim, "Parveen Shakir," 173.

occluded astute criticism of her lyrical art."[500] Furthermore, distrust of those looks and the idea that Shakir might have been seeking to attract admiration for them, have contributed to distrust on the part of male poets who diminished her talents, and feminists who rejected such traditional, gendered behavior.

Conclusion

Shakir's poetry is subtler than the poetry of her famous contemporaries, the likes of Kishwar Naheed and Fahmid Riaz. She lyrically supports and espouses feminist concerns through her commentary on the ills of society, and the neglect, or incapability of the state to address ills such as workplace discrimination and harassment of women, the violence that disproportionately affects women, and child labor that results in a high percentage of young girls to go uneducated and who have to carve out their identities through marriage, and by birthing children.

As Anita Anantharam explains, for women who are "committed to life within Pakistani society, resistance cannot be measured with the yardstick of Western feminism, but must be understood as complicating any simplistic reading of how third-world feminists negotiate and mediate such constructions of center and periphery, insider and outsider, writer and activist."[501] We must take such negotiations into account when approaching Parveen Shakir's poetry. Shakir represents a continuation of the incremental process of the representation of women in Urdu poetry started by Akhtar Shirani and Kaifi Azmi. She accepts their progressive ideals and builds upon their thought, which

[500] Conversations with Syed Akbar Hyder, March, 2015.
[501] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 100.

was geared towards promoting gender equality among other ideals, such as building a classless society. However, whereas Shirani and Kaifi mostly addressed women's issues, Shakir strives for recognition of women's hopes and desires as well. She presents woman in a more carnal way, something that women had recently started doing in Urdu poetry when she was writing. She demonstrates how women's concerns are social concerns and that puts her and the content of her poetry in company with progressive poets; she just chooses to not opt for sloganeering. A deeper reading of her poetry shows that Shakir was indeed a feminist and so is her poetry, and that she certainly has a place in the annals of feminist Urdu poets.

Chapter Six: Ishrat Afreen

mērā qad
mērē bāp sē ūncā niklā
aur mirī māṅ jīt gayī [502]

My height
Outgrew my father's
And my mother won

Ishrat Afreen

The short poem introduced above is titled *intisāb* (Dedication) and is the opening poem in Ishrat Afreen's first poetry volume, *kunj pīlē phūloṅ kā* (Grove of Yellow Flowers). It is a fine representation of her poetry, philosophy, and ideology. In this poem the subject uses the word *bāp* to talk about her father, which in most cases has a pejorative connotation if speaking about one's father. In this pithy, yet eloquent way, Ishrat Afreen challenges the patriarchal sensibilities of her society in which a father is to be respected without question, and a woman is expected to be subservient and domesticated.

This chapter will first look at the historical background, which informs the context of much of Ishrat Afreen's poetry. Her first volume was published at a time when an already conservative society of Pakistan was deliberately marginalizing women by passing discriminatory legislation against them. Afreen was following in the footsteps of the famous feminist poets Kishwar Naheed (b. 1940) and Fahmida Riaz (b. 1946), who had become well known for challenging patriarchy, oppressive traditions and corrupt

[502] Afreen, Ishrat. *Kunj Pīlē Phūloṅ Kā*. Karachi: Ahmad Brothers, 1985.

governance; and in those of Parveen Shakir (1952-1994), the poet who gave voice to women's hopes, dreams, and desires of love and romance, which they are often denied in conservative patriarchal societies. Afreen built upon the foundation laid by these poets—it was Afreen's uniquely concise style that gave voice to women's collective suffering. Afreen is a champion of women's rights in Pakistan and beyond and has devoted much of her poetry to portray women as strong and proud. Though she addresses the oppressiveness of her society and the ways in which women are exploited, she also focuses on a woman's ego and her pride, which she believes must be nurtured, recognized, appreciated, and respected.

I. Historical Context:

The Process of Islamization

Pakistan adopted its first constitution in 1956, nine years after the creation of the country. The delay in the adoption of the constitution was caused by disagreements over the Islamic provisions in the document. In March 1949, the Constituent Assembly had passed the Objectives Resolution, which stated that, the Government of Pakistan will create a state, in which, "principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed; wherein the Muslims of Pakistan shall be enabled individually and collectively to order their lives in accordance with the teachings and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and Sunnah."[503] In the final draft of the Constitution of 1956 the president was given the power to appoint a

[503] Charles H. Kennedy, "Who Decides? Islam and Legal Reform in Pakistan," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1992): 769.

committee to help bring existing laws in conformity with Islam. According to the constitution "Pakistan was to be an Islamic state" however, modernists in the country were successful in denying the implementation of strict Islamic laws by keeping a check on the authority of the *ulema*.[504] Nevertheless, having provisions in the constitution that affirmed the importance of Islam in establishing the country's laws set the stage for any future leader to use Islam as the basis for bringing about social change. Pakistan's leader after leader has done so by appealing to religious hardliners for political support.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto came into power in 1971 and took the first steps to implement Islamic laws in Pakistan. He styled himself as an Islamic Socialist and his call for Islamic Socialism "was quickly rebaptized 'Mohammedan equality' [*musuwat-i-Muhammadi*]."[505] The constitution of 1973, which was implemented under the new Bhutto regime, declared that Islam was the state religion of Pakistan. Furthermore, the constitution established that a non-Muslim could not hold the offices of President or Prime Minister. According to the Islamic clauses the state was to facilitate citizens in promoting the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah.[506]

It was also under Bhutto's auspices that Islamization took a dangerous turn when he had Ahmadis declared a non-Muslim minority in 1974, by means of a constitutional amendment. Bhutto took this action in response to anti-Ahamadi riots of 1973 lead by Islamic parties. Although systematic discrimination against the Ahmadis had unabashedly begun in the 1950s, it was Bhutto in the aftermath of the East Pakistan-Bangladesh

[504] Kennedy, "Who Decides?" 770.
[505] Christophe Jaffrelot, ed. *A History of Pakistan and its Origins*, Translated by Gillian Beaumont, (New York: Anthem Press, 2004), 247.
[506] Talbot, *Pakistan*, 229.

debacle who sealed the political fate of this community. Bhutto felt pressured by Islamic hardliners who attacked him by claiming that he was a flawed Muslim and accused him of receiving financial and organizational support from the Ahmadis.[507] While downplaying his own affiliation with the minority Shii community, Bhutto tried to placate the religious hardliners and affirmed that when it comes to his personhood and identity he was a Muslim first and a Pakistani second; and that he "was a servant of Islam and a *mujahid* (soldier) in its cause.[508] Christophe Jaffrelot contends that it was Bhutto who opened the floodgates to Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan. By giving in to the demands of Islamists, and constitutionally declaring the Ahmadis non-Muslims, he created a second-class citizenry which would lead to not only continued persecution of Ahmadis but also of Christians, Shias, Hindus, and anamists.[509]

Zia's Hudood Ordinances & Zina

On the 22nd of February 1979, Zia's military government announced its plan for Islamization, which came about in the form of the *Hudood* Ordinances of 1979.[510] The purpose of the Islamization program was to lift each individual's moral character and

[507] Jaffrelot, *A History of Pakistan*, 232. The anti-Ahmadi movement in Pakistan dated back to the 1950s when an Islamic group called Ahrar wanted the Ahmadis to be declared a non-Muslim minority.
[508] Anwar H. Syed, "Z.A. Bhutto's Self-Characterizations and Pakistani Political Culture," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 12 (1978): 126.
[509] Jaffrelot, *A History of Pakistan*, 247.
[510] Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* (New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1987), 100. Interestingly, this announcement was made on the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.
- Charles H. Kennedy, "Islamization in Pakistan: Implementations of the Hudood Ordinances," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 3 (1988): 307 gives the date of the promulgation of the Hudood Ordinances as February 10, 1979.
- Anita M. Weiss, "Women's Position in Pakistan: Sociocultural Effects of Islamization," *Asian Survey* 25, no. 8 (1985): 861. A crime that is subject to *hadd* (pl. hudood) punishment is one that has been committed against God's divine command.

create *nizam-i-mustafa* (rule of the Prophet).[511] The *Hudood* Ordinances dealt with sex-related crimes (*zina*) and theft. According to the new ordinances *zina* and theft crimes were to be tried under Islamic law (with Islamic punishments), as defined in the Qur'an and understood through the *Sunnah* (tradition based on Muhammad's acitons and sayings). For instance, *hadd* (limit) crime of theft would incur as punishment the amputation of the right hand at the wrist. However, *hadd* crimes also required stricter rules of evidence in order to obtain conviction. The evidence for conviction of theft required two adult male witnesses who were free from sin, and had actually witnessed the crime taking place. There were also requirements on the value of the property stolen, which had to be worth more than 4.457 ounces of gold.[512]

However, Women's organizations like the Women's Actions Forum (WAF), Pakistan Women Lawyers Association (PWLA), and All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) were more concerned with the *zina* laws because they believed these to be extremely discriminatory against women. *Zina* crimes include adultery, fornication, rape (*zina-bil-jabr*), and prostitution. *Zina* (adultery and fornication) is committed if two sane adults who are not married to each other have sexual intercourse. The prescribed *hadd* punishment for *zina* is death by stoning for married individuals for adultery, and a hundred lashes for unmarried offenders for fornication. The evidence required for conviction is either confession from the offenders (with the option of retracting the

[511] Talbot, *Pakistan*, 272.
[512] Kennedy, "Islamization in Pakistan," 306-07.

confession any time before the execution of the punishment), or the testimony of four Muslim male adults of good repute who witnessed the act of penetration.[513]

According to Anita Weiss the women of Pakistan were most affected by the adultery laws in the *Hudood* Ordinance.[514] The way convictions had been attained against women had been especially discriminatory.[515] In 1981, two years after the *Hudood* Ordinances came into existence, the case of Fehmida and Allah Bux became the first in which a man was sentenced to death by stoning and the woman to a hundred lashes.[516] Fehmida, a woman from lower middle-class family fell in love with a bus driver, Allah Bux, who was from a lower class and a different community than Fehmida's. They eloped and Fehmida moved in with Allah Bux, his children, and his first wife. Fehmida's parents tried to bribe Allah Bux to divorce their daughter; Allah Bux refused and Fehmida's parents filed a complaint with the police that Fehmida had been abducted. When the police came to retrieve Fehmida she was pregnant. The husband and wife claimed they had an oral agreement and were wedded; they had simply neglected registering their *nikah* (Islamic marriage ceremony). Neither confessed to the crime but they were both convicted of adultery, instead of neglect of marriage registration, which would have been punishable with only Rs. 1000, under Section 5 of the Family Ordinance Law.[517] Without confession of guilt, without the eyewitness testimony of four

[513] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 106. On September 30 1983 Lal Mai became the first woman to be flogged in public. Convicted of *zina* she was sentenced to fifteen lashes to be carried out in public. Some five thousand people are said to have witnessed the sentence being carried out (p. 105).
[514] Weiss, "Women's Position in Pakistan," 869.
[515] Weiss, "Women's Position in Pakistan," 870.
[516] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 102.
[517] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 102. One commentator asked that if simply neglecting to register the marriage was enough to charge Fehmida and Allah Bux with *zina* (adultery), then where does

Muslim men of good repute, it can be concluded that Fehmida's pregnancy was taken as evidence of her guilt. A prominent lawyer who was an expert on Islamic jurisprudence appealed the case in front of the Supreme Court, which returned the case to the lower court where it was eventually dismissed.[518]

That *zina* laws were applied harshly against women is exemplified by the 1983 case of Safia Bibi, a young, blind, domestic servant, who was raped by two men - a father and a son. Safia Bibi, was punished to fifteen lashes by a Sessions Judge for having committed *zina*, based solely on the pregnancy occurring from the rape. Both the men were acquitted because there was not enough evidence to convict them of rape, since the evidence required was either confession, or the act being witnessed by four Muslim men of good repute. Such reasoning and application of the law puts an undue burden on women by taking pregnancy after a rape as evidence and confession of guilt, while letting men walk free. It also makes it nearly impossible to convict a man of rape "for what four *salah* [pious] Muslim men would stand by and let a woman get raped?"[519]As Ayesha Jalal in her recent study of Pakistan's history points out, "the *zina* ordinance obscured the distinction between adultery and rape…. Downtrodden women bore the brunt of this injudicious and inhumane law."[520]

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the *zina* Ordinance place the marriages before 1961's Family Laws Ordinance when marriages did not need to be registered.
- Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 67-68. It was the Fehmida and Allah Bux case that mobilized women and resulted in the foundation of Women's Action Forum in 1981.

[518] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 102.

[519] Weiss, "Women's Position in Pakistan," 870.

[520] Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics,* Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 224.

Charles Kennedy asserts that the *Hudood* Ordinance laws were not more discriminatory towards women since the majority of the convictions - 84% at the district and sessions court level, and 90% at the Federal Sharia Court level – had been of men. In cases of adultery, 56% of convictions at the district and sessions courts and 70% at the Federal Sharia Court were men. Kennedy dismisses Anita Weiss' and the claims of Pakistan's women's organizations that these laws were discriminatory against women and instead offers the conclusion that "if anything there has been a modest gender discrimination against men."[521]

However, Kennedy does admit that the *Zina* Ordinance had been created as a way to control disobedient daughters and estranged wives. Kennedy notes that in the cases he studied he saw three patterns emerge in many *zina* (adultery and fornication) complaints that were filed: One, when a man and woman marry and the woman's family does not condone the relationship they file a *zina* case against them. Two, a man accuses his "former" spouse of *zina* if she remarries. And three, a girl who is accused of bringing dishonor to her family is found to lay the claim that her "boyfriend" had in fact raped her.[522]

Regardless of whether the case statistics show juridical discrimination against women or not, one can see that the *zina* laws created a social atmosphere that gave license to men by which they could exercise even more control over the women. And even though Kennedy reports that there is a 70% acquittal rate for *zina* related cases once

[521] Kennedy, "Islamization in Pakistan," 312.
[522] Kennedy, "Islamization in Pakistan," 314.

they are appealed to the Federal Sharia Court,[523] the accused pays heavily in legal costs, often remains incarcerated till the appellate process is complete, and the "social effects of *zina* conviction are disastrous."[524] One can easily imagine the stigma associated with having been imprisoned and having gone through several trials. Reintroduction into society is difficult even in progressive societies so it is not difficult to imagine the burden it must put on women in conservative societies. The legal impact of the *Hudood* Ordinances may have been minimal on Pakistan's women; their social impact however, was tremendous. Although 95% of the people charged with *zina* crimes were eventually acquitted and released after the trial, prisoners languished in jails for years waiting to be brought before a judge.[525] Even though legally the *Zina* Ordinance applied to both genders, women were more susceptible to adverse affects of such a law in Pakistani society.

Marriage, to a great extent, in a kinship based society like Pakistan's is a transaction in which women are not partners; they are instead precious gifts to bargain with, and for families to make alliances within kinship groups. Shahnaz Khan even goes as far as saying that indebted families may even view their "daughter's sexuality as a "valuable asset" for which they can command a high price and get out of debt.[526] The *Zina* Ordinance empowered families and gave them more means to intimidate young women into acquiescence, thereby ensuring continuity of extreme forms of patriarchy.

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[523] Kennedy, "Islamization in Pakistan," 314.
[524] Kennedy, "Islamization in Pakistan," 315.
[525] Shahnaz Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation of Pakistani Women," *Feminist Review* 75, (2003): 77.
[526] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 82.

Shahnaz Khan conducted interviews starting in 1998 with a hundred and fifty women who were either incarcerated in *Kot Lakpat* prison Lahore and Karachi Central Jail, or were residing in *Darul Amans*.[527] Khan found that charges of *zina* and "selling of daughters" into marriage often resulted in situations where women had to sacrifice their freedom and happiness and seek refuge at these strict shelters where they had no rights.[528] These women realized that as women accused of *zina* they were labeled as immoral and sexually loose.[529] Earning such a reputation and being labeled an immoral woman is not an easy prospect to live with in South Asia; it is a steep price to pay for many in order to assert their rights, which is why many women give in to their parents' demands and enter marriages against their wills.

One of the interviews Shahnaz Khan conducted was with Gulbano, a fifteen-year-old girl who was forced to marry a twenty-two-year-old man according to her father's wishes. However, Gulbano's father left the family and the country, her mother decided that Gulbano should divorce her husband and marry another man, one who had promised her money in exchange for Gulbano's hand in marriage. Since Gulbano was a minor, her mother was able to file charges of abduction against Gulbano's husband, and charges of *zina* against both him and Gulbano. Gulbano ran away and found shelter in a *Darul Aman*. While she was at the shelter she was not allowed visits from her husband or the in-

[527] State-run women's shelters which take on the role of informal prisons due to the restrictions which prohibit women from leaving and the only visitors allowed to them without permission of the courts are their immediate families.
[528] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 80-81.
[529] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 84.

laws, who she said had been good to her. At the time of the interview, Gulbano had already made multiple appearances at court to plead her case.[530]

Nausheen, a twenty-year-old woman had been interned at *Kot Lakpat* jail for three months at the time of her interview with Shahnaz Khan; she described how her parents filed charges of *zina* against her when she married against their wishes. Both Nausheen and her husband went to jail, and Nausheen, who was in the last stages of pregnancy, had to consider the prospect of giving birth in jail. Even though Nausheen had a *nikahnama* (marriage certificate) proving her legal marriage, it did not benefit her because her parents bribed the officials who performed and registered the marriage. Since a father is considered the *wali* (guardian) of the daughter, his right can trump the husband's claim to his wife, and in effect, even dismiss the marriage certificate - a legal document.[531]

Women who have almost no rights vis-à-vis their parents often find themselves in a case of "out of the frying pan and into the fire," and are also frequently exploited and threatened by their husbands. Poor and illiterate women find themselves especially vulnerable. Husbands have been known to divorce their wives verbally, according to Islamic tradition, and not register the official divorce. Then, if the woman remarries, the husband may file charges of adultery against the wife who thought she was divorced - as is shown in Nusrat's example.

Nusrat, a twenty-six-year-old woman interned at the Karachi Central Jail told Shahnaz Khan that her husband, Ahmad, used to beat her. One day he beat her so badly

[530] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 82 - 83. The practice of paying the "bride-price" to a parent is contradictory to Islam which requires such money be paid to the bride.
[531] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 84.

that she needed stitches on her nose and forehead. Then he divorced her by saying *talaq* three times and told her to leave his house. Nusrat took her three children and went to her parents' house. Since her family was poor, they pressured her to marry again, which she did. Her new husband, Amin, was kind to her and her children but Nusrat's former husband filed charges of adultery against her, sending Nusrat and Amin to jail; the children had to be in jail with them. Ahmad blackmailed Nusrat and Amin for money and asked for a hundred thousand rupees in order to drop the *zina* charges.[532] Such poor women become victims of the police as well who often try to extort money form them. Other times the police are simply too eager to accept these cases in order to increase their numbers of solved crimes.[533] The *Zina* Ordinance created a society that denied legal equality to women who were already denied social equality. Furthermore, the agents of the state, like the police, also took advantage of women and their vulnerabilities when these women sought protection from the law.[534] It is a well-known fact that policemen often rape and abuse women who are their prisoners or those who seek help from them.

Rashida Bibi's case is one in which a young woman was sold off in marriage by an indebted father. Eighteen-year-old Rashida Bibi had been in a *Darul Aman* for four months when she spoke with Shahnaz Khan. She recounted how her father owed money to an elderly man and forced her to marry him. Her husband and the husband's first wife beat her and also began to prostitute her. She registered a case of rape against her

[532] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 85.
[533] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 86.
[534] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 88.

husband and his first wife, and because of the subsequent threats she had to move into a women's shelter.[535]

Perhaps one of the most famous cases of rape that brought the plight of Pakistani women to the world stage was that of Mukhtar Mai. Mukhtar Mai was gang raped by four men of the Mastoi tribe in a village in the Punjab province, on June 22, 2002. Her rape was conducted as a form of retribution. It was alleged that Mukhtar Mai's brother, twelve-year-old Shakoor, was seen in the company of a woman of the influential Mastoi tribe. The Mastoi tribe filed charges of *zina* against the boy, who was arrested for adultery and taken to jail. Mukhtar Mai's family claimed that the charges were baseless and fabricated only after they had threatened to file charges against the three men of the Mastoi tribe who had sodomized the twelve-year-old boy. The case was then brought to the village council, which decided that in order to settle the case Shakoor would have to marry the woman he was seen with, and that his sister, Mukhtar Mai (a divorcee), would have to marry a man from the Mastoi tribe.[536] It can be seen from this case that culturally a woman is often regarded as more of a property than a person in South Asia; that she could be handed over in marriage to the Mastoi tribe as payment to satisfy their honor, even though she played no part in any of the events that had transpired.

However, the Mastoi tribe rejected the settlement offered by the village council and demanded an-eye-for-an-eye form of justice. Mukhtar Mai was summoned to the village council to apologize on her brother's behalf; when she arrived, she was dragged to

[535] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation,"85 – 86.
[536] "Mukhtar Mai – History of a Rape Case." BBC News, June 28, 2005, accessed February 10, 2015, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4620065.stm.

a nearby hut and raped by four men. After that the Mastoi tribe told the police that justice had been done and Shakoor was promptly released from jail.[537] This episode shows the callous disregard for women's rights by the police, the agents of the state, who would allow people to take justice into their own hands and exact such a harsh punishment on a woman to satisfy their "honor." In a twist of irony, it was a religious leader, the village *imam*, who brought the case to the media's attention. After Mukhtar Mai's case was published in a local press the international media took up the story.[538]

This case also demonstrated the complex and inefficient nature of Pakistan's criminal courts apparatus. The four men who raped Mukhtar Mai, including two who aided in the rape, were tried and given the guilty verdict by a trial court on August 31, 2002. The Multan Bench of the Lahore High Court overturned the guilty verdict on March 11, 2005. After appeals for justice from Mukhtar Mai the *Sharia* Court overturned the Lahore High Court's decision to acquit the guilty men, citing that as a *zina* case it came under the jurisdiction of the Islamic courts. On March 14, Pakistan's Supreme Court (the highest court in the land) set aside the *Sharia* Court's ruling and ordered the release of the four men found guilty. They were, however, arrested once again on the 18th of March 2002, after Mai appealed to President Musharraf for justice.[539]

This case underscores the complicated and cumbersome process one has to endure in order to receive justice. Furthermore, had Mukhtar Mai's case not been brought to the

[537] "Mukhtar Mai – History of a Rape Case." BBC News, June 28, 2005, accessed February 10, 2015, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4620065.stm.
[538] "Mukhtar Mai – History of a Rape Case." BBC News, June 28, 2005, accessed February 10, 2015, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4620065.stm.
[539] "Mukhtar Mai – History of a Rape Case." BBC News, June 28, 2005, accessed February 10, 2015, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4620065.stm.

media's attention she would have been a silent victim of Pakistan's repressive tribal justice. It is safe to assume that for every Mukhtar Mai there are countless women whose cases are not brought to the attention of the media. Mukhtar Mai was able to maneuver through Pakistan's court systems due to much help from other well wishers since her case had become known around the world. However, those who do not receive such attention must go through trials and appeals on their own, a very daunting task for poor, rural women, who are often unable to read the convoluted language of law.

Qisas, Diyat, & Qanoon-e-Shahadat

Several other discriminatory laws against women were either proposed or passed during the Islamization process, two of which were the laws of *Qisas* and *Diyat* (retribution and blood money) and *Qanoon-e-Shahadat* (the law of evidence). The *Qisas* and *Diyat* law was drafted in December 1980 by the Council of Islamic Ideology and passed by the *Majlis-e-Shoora* (The Federal Council) in August 1984.[540] The law proposed that *diyat* (blood money) for a female victim of *qatl-e-khata* (unintentional murder) was to be half that of a man. The same rule was applicable in the case of an injury or maiming of a woman; she was to be compensated at half the amount a man would be. However, the double standard in the way women were being treated was apparent because when it came to punishments a woman found guilty of murder would get the same punishment as a man.[541] Basically, the proposed law set the worth of a

[540] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 110. The *Majlis-e-Shoora* was a fake parliament set up to create a political lobby for Zia after he took over as dictator of Pakistan and dismissed the elected government.
[541] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 111.

woman's life at half that of a man, thereby designating them as unequal citizens of the country.

All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) and Women's Actions Forum (WAF) challenged the law for its repugnancy for putting a price on human life, but also on Islamic grounds. The women argued that the Qur'an neither sets any amount of *diyat*, nor does it address the gender of victims where *diyat* is applicable, and says: "It is not for a believer to take a believer's life except by mistake; and he who kills a believer by mistake should free a slave who is a believer and pay blood money to the victim's family unless they forgo it as an act of charity."[542] One can conclude that the government's interpretation of Islamic code was most likely driven by cultural and social influences of Pakistan since under the Islamic code both men and women are believers and hence equal. Anita Weiss explains why the Pakistani government would interpret the Islamic code in such a way and writes that the traditional Islamic law, as applied in South Asia, aims to keep the system of "extended patrilineal kinship networks" intact, thereby allowing men to exercise control over women.[543]

The proponents of this law claimed that since men were the primary breadwinners the family would suffer a greater loss if the man died. Women's organizations countered that argument by reminding that even the women who did not contribute to the family economically were responsible for the maintenance of the household in many ways. This law also disregarded a large number of women who did in fact play a role in contributing financially to their families in both rural and urban Pakistan. And by not distinguishing

[542] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 111.
[543] Weiss, "Women's Position in Pakistan," 876-77.

between a non-earning male and an earning female this law singled out women for discrimination and also missed the "fundamental objective" of a law, which is to provide justice.[544]

A recent example of "blood money justice" in Pakistan that came to the world's attention was the case of Raymond Davis, a CIA contractor who killed two men in Lahore, in January 2011. Davis was charged with murder but acquitted after the relatives of the dead men pardoned him in court. The judge hearing the case was told that the family had received *diya* (blood money) and the case was settled based on Islamic law. Ironically, the acquittal of Raymond Davis based on Islamic law drew the ire of conservative Islamic groups such as the *Jamaat-e-Islami* who threatened protests over the deal.[545]

Another law that was offensive towards women and suggested that women had a reduced status as citizens was the Law of Evidence (*qanoon-e-shahadat*); proposed to the president by the Council on Islamic Ideology. The Law of Evidence became law on October 28, 1984. When originally proposed in April 1982, the law held that, "in all cases other than those covered by the *Hudood* Ordinance and any other 'special law', two male witnesses, and in the absence of two male witnesses, one male and two females, would be required for proving a crime."[546] And according to Anita Weiss, a very strict interpretation of this law would have barred women from testifying in any *hadd* case.[547]

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[544] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 111.
[545] "Cia Contractor Ray Davis Freed Over Pakistan Killings." BBC News, March 16, 2011, accessed February 10, 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12757244.
[546] Mumtaz and Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan*, 106.
[547] Weiss, "Women's Position in Pakistan," 871.

Women's organizations condemned this proposed law and organized demonstrations to protest. On February 12, 1983 the Punjab Women Lawyers' Association called for a march to the Punjab High Court in Lahore, in order to present a memorandum against the proposed law to the Chief Justice. The call to march drew out around three hundred women; the famous poet Habib Jalib (1928-1993) also joined the women and recited anti-government poems. When the police tried to remove him forcefully from the cordoned off area it triggered a frenzied protest by the women, who broke the police lines and started running towards the High Court. The police responded with force, used tear gas, beat up and dragged women along the road, and arrested many women. This street demonstration and women's courage at defying the dictatorial government's ban on assembly and protest had a tremendous effect, and many politicians started taking women seriously.[548]

Women's Action Forum and the Pakistan Women Lawyer's Association opposed the Law of Evidence using examples from the Qur'an and the Islamic past. They argued that the Qur'an gives only one example, *ayat* 282 (*Sura al-Baqr*), in which two women are brought in to testify in place of one man. The role of the second woman in that instance was to remind the first of any details she may have been forgetting.[549] The women also pointed out that in many *ayats* (verses of the Qur'an) the testimony of men and women is considered equal. They also gave the example of Hazrat Khadija, the Prophet's wife, who was the first to testify that Muhammad was the Prophet of God. And

[548] Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed (1987, p. 107). However, Anita Weiss reports that not all women in Pakistan were against these laws and in fact a women's organization *Majlis-e-Khawati-i-Pakistan* which reject the U.N. Charter on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women as being un-Islamic supported the police using force against the women at the march (1985, p. 873).
[549] Anita M. Weiss (1985, p. 871).

that upon the testimony of Hazrat Aisha (another of the Prophet's wives) hundreds of *ahadith* (words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad and his companions) were verified. [550] Furthermore, they argued that women should in fact be allowed to testify in *hadd* cases based on the example of Nalia, Caliph Usman's wife, whose sole testimony was accepted to confirm the guilt of Usman's murderer. After much debate and protestation from women's organization the final draft limited the testimony of two women being equal of one man in only financial cases. In all other disputes the law gave discretionary powers to the presiding judges. [551]

The Ansari Commission

Several other steps were taken by the government, which could have affected the role of women in society and the opportunities available to them. The Ansari Commission, put together in 1982, was tasked to advise the president on the practices of contemporary society that were repugnant to Islam and needed changing. Some of the proposals of the Ansari Commission which were *repugnant to women* included the following: disqualifying women from being the head of state; prohibiting women from leaving the country without a male escort; and that unmarried or unaccompanied women should be barred from serving overseas in the Foreign Service. The commission also proposed amending the electoral rules stating that, whereas a man may run for office at

[550] Anita M. Weiss (1985, p. 872).
[551] Anita M. Weiss (1985, pp. 872).

the age of twenty five, a woman must have reached the age of fifty to do the same, and she must also get the permission of a male relative in order to serve in the government.[552]

Women's organizations took a firm stance opposing the proposals of the Ansari Commission and countered that there have been many female Muslim rulers throughout history. Bilquis ruled as the queen of Sheba, and two queens reigned in Yemen during the Sulaihid dynasty. As far as contesting in elections in contemporary society went, the women offered the example of Fatima Jinnah (1893-1967), the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), who contested in the presidential elections in Pakistan in 1963. Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan (1905-1990), the wife of Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan (1895-1951), was the president of APWA at the time the Ansari Commission submitted its proposals; she asserted that some of the clauses contained in the Ansari Commission Report were "repugnant to the Holy Qur'an and Islam, which gives women equal rights with men in all public matters."[553] However, in Pakistan, it is not the Holy Qur'an that guides policies, but rather some archaic cultural idea of morality. Shahnaz Khan offers poignant words on Pakistan's government and many segments of its society eager to impose morality on the people through strict legislation. She says that when "the nation needs morality…women and lower-class citizens are sacrificed to provide a moral face to the nation."[554]

Zia's ultimate goal of creating the *nizam-i-mustafa* (rule of the Prophet) was to make *Sharia* the supreme law of the land and he attempted to do so by issuing the

[552] Weiss, "Women's Position in Pakistan," 872-73.
[553] Weiss, "Women's Position in Pakistan," 873.
[554] Khan, ""Zina" and the Moral Regulation," 88.

Enforcement of Shariah Ordinance, 1988. Its provision established *Sharia* as the law of the land and the courts were ordered to decide cases based on Islamic jurisprudence.[555] However, this ordinance failed to become law because of Zia's death in August that year. According to the 1985 Constitution, a presidential ordinance is repealed if it is not considered and passed by the legislature within four months of its promulgation. Ghulam Ishaq Khan (1915-2006) who succeeded Zia as president reintroduced the Shariah Ordinance and presented it to the newly elected National Assembly in October 1988. However, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's (1953-2007) government decided to take no action on the ordinance and allowed it to expire.[556] The Shariah Ordinance was ultimately passed in May 1991, by the government of Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif.[557]

II. Biographical Information[558]

maiṅ bacpanē mēṅ bhī miṭṭī kē ghar banātī thī[559]
sadā ik uns rahā gaoṅ kē makāṅ sē mujhē

mirī anā mirā ma'yār-e-fan nah ho kyūṇ kar
yah fan milā hai virāsat mēṅ apnī māṅ sē mujhē

Even in childhood I used to make houses of clay
Since eternity I remained attached to the village hut

Why should my ego not be the measure of my skill?
I have inherited this skill from my mother

[555] Kennedy, "Who Decides?" 777.
[556] Kennedy, "Who Decides?" 778.
[557] Kennedy, "Who Decides?" 779. Kennedy maintains that the enforcement of the Shariah Act of 1991 will have little impact on the pace of the Islamization project in Pakistan because as an "act" it does not amend the constitution and the structure of the superior courts or their jurisdictions.
[558] Ishrat Afreen, questionnaire answers, February 14, 2015.
[559] Ishrat Afreen, *Kunj Pīlē Phūloṅ Kā*, 43.

Ishrat Afreen was born on December 25, 1956 in the port city of Karachi. Karachi was not only the capital of Pakistan at the time but was also the destination for scores of *Muhajirs*, the Urdu speaking migrants from India, who settled there in great numbers after the Partition of India in 1947. Afreen completed her formal schooling in Karachi. She attended Pakistan Public Primary School and then finished her secondary education at Government Girl's Secondary School. She received her B.A. from Allama Iqbal Degree College, Malir, Karachi, and went on to earn an M.A. in Urdu Literature from Karachi University.

Her introduction to poetry and the rhythm and sounds of the spoken word came through the lullabies her mother sang for her. Her mother recited poems to her at bedtime and her grandmother also read poetry to her. She remembers her grandmother's voice being so melodious that she would think that, "the nightingale was a lonely woman." She explains that poetry came to her naturally; it was like a child learning the mother tongue. During her childhood, she enjoyed the various religious recitations she heard over the mosque loud speakers during different festivals and observations. In the Islamic month of *Muharram,* she heard the elegies of the famous Urdu poet Mir Anis (1802-1874) for the first ten days. After that the mosques would broadcast poetry of Persian poets like Amir Khusrow (1253-1325) and other Sufi poets; these poets also affected her poetic sensibilities. She was immersed in a culture and family that appreciated classical poetry, so it was natural for her to develop an interest in poetry. She says that she was always interested in the written word and read whatever was written on any scrap of paper she encountered.

Unlike many Urdu poets, she did not have any one *ustād* (teacher) whom she sought out to be her poetry master and offer *islāh* (corrections). She had a keen ear for poetics, and when she attended gatherings where people would discuss literature and poetry she made a note of any advice offered to her and interesting points she overheard. However, once her poetry began to be published, she approached Rais Amrohvi (1914-1988) at his poetry gathering and asked him for *islāh*; he told her, that a poet is God's student, and regardless, her verses should not be indebted to corrections.

No one poet influences her poetry. She says that "poetry is the journey to find oneself," and in the end the poet establishes her own tone and manner. However, she explains, that in her ideology and philosophy, writers and poets who have been a part of the Progressive Writers' Movement have influenced her.

Reminiscing about the development of her poetry she says that in childhood she was actually very fond of drawing and sketching, however, she could not develop these skills. Then she started writing prose, but when that did not see promise she took up poetry. She composed her first *ghazal* when she was in sixth or seventh grade and that *ghazal* won high praise from her father and uncle, which gave her confidence in her abilities. Then she began composing poetry upon request from others; it was her way of honing her poetic skills. She says that, "the poetry composed as practice becomes the fertilizer for the later serious creativity."[560] Since it was her mother and grandmother who recited poetry to her, she associated women's voice with much of the poetry heard—even when the poetry was written or recited by men. She learned about women's pain from

[560] Ishrat Afreen, questionnaire answers, February 14, 2015.

these voices, which she believes became a great lesson for her, and that is how she began her journey in appreciating her own consciousness and ego.

Some of poets she enjoyed reading in the early stages of her poetic journey were Josh Malihabadi (1894-1982), Nasir Kazmi (1925-1972), and Noon Meem Rashid (1910-1975). She appreciated the variety of subjects in Josh's poetry and the fact that the description of women in his poetry was different from descriptions in traditional poetry. Instead of speaking of women as objects of entertainment for men, he addresses women as people who work and struggle. Nasir's poetry had the simplicity that she welcomed and she memorized numerous verses of his. She developed her skill of conveying deeper thoughts in simpler ways through his poetry when she was younger, but soon broke away from his influence. Rashid's poetry featured the musicality that sounded magical to her, and she felt his poems made her blood dance. However, she did not agree with Nasir's thought along the lines of "art for art's sake." She also felt uneasy reading his poems because she noticed an element of scorn or contempt for women in them. She attributes that uneasiness to her own ego and pride. The topic of a woman's ego and pride is something Afreen frequently engages. In order to portray a woman's fullness as a person, she composed a poem, "*Jahāṅzād*," who was a character in Rashid's poem "*Hasan Kūzāhgar*." Whereas Rashid wrote his poem from a man's perspective, Afreen gave voice to the woman in the poem, and showed the woman's side of the story.[561]

Afreen says that the world as it is fosters an established order that is oppressive towards women, and women have to continuously struggle for their existence. Literature

[561] Excerpts from that poem are translated below.

has played an important part in this struggle. She comments on the women's liberation movement within Urdu literature and explains that although Rashid Jahan and Ismat Chughtai were the first women to address women's issues in prose, it was Ada Jafri (1924- 2015) who led the way in Urdu poetry. "She was the first woman whose poetry was published using her real name."[562] This was a significant occurrence because in Ada Jafri's society when the mail was delivered to a woman it was addressed to "the daughter of so and so." A family tree only listed the word daughter, instead of the girl's name. And a female poet would use her initials instead of her full name, as for example the poet *Zē. Khē. Shīn* (1894-1922).[563]

According to Afreen, Ada Jafri laid the foundation and was followed by many other female poets like Kishwar Naheed (b. 1940) and Fahmida Riaz (b. 1946) who composed poetry on forbidden topics like women's oppression and exploitation, and virginity and pregnancy; these topics were not generally discussed in poetry that had been extremely male-centered for centuries. Topics such as these risked backlash from either the military dictatorship, or the *mullahs.*

Afreen believes that Parveen Shakir (1952-1994) gave voice to women's emotions [of love and romance]. In this way women have tackled gender issues from various directions and have challenged and broken many taboos while doing so. Afreen sees herself differently from the above-mentioned poets, who more or less focused on the struggles of the self, of loneliness – primarily personal struggles. She is more interested in the collective struggles of women and bringing awareness to woman as a complete

[562] Ishrat Afreen, questionnaire answers, February 14, 2015.
[563] Her real name was Zahida Khatun Sherwani.

person, with personal pride and a strong ego. Rukhsana Ahmad comments on Ishrat Afreen's use of the concept of *anā* (ego) and writes that it "perhaps derives from Iqbal's concept of the Self. As opposed to its somewhat negative meaning in English, Afreen uses the Urdu equivalent of the word ego to represent the individual self engaged in defiant and courageous battle with society."[564]

When she wrote her first *nazm* (free verse poem), *ēk gẖēr-aham afrād kē liyē* (For An Unimportant Person), about the daily struggles of a poor woman who frequented her house, she gave voice to the day-to-day struggles of that woman. When this poem was received with much acclaim, she came to the conclusion that the pain of eighty percent of the struggling female population was her own pain and struggle. She was, of course, relating to the struggles of the women under the Islamicized Pakistan, the women who became targets of the *Hudood* Ordinances, and the women whose reputations and lives were ruined due to the discriminatory laws.

III. Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz

Before turning to Ishrat Afreen's poetry, it is important to briefly discuss the two iconic feminist Urdu poets that preceded Afreen, Kishwar Naheed (b. 1940) and Fahmida Riaz (b. 1946). The influence of these women's bold and overt feminist poetry is reflected in Afreen's poetry. In the same vein as these two poets preceding her, Afreen also paints a picture of an independent and strong woman who does not need to be subservient to male authority, and does not need a man to protect her.

[564] Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 27.

According to Rukhsana Ahmad, "if there is a feminist who poses a serious threat to men through her work, her lifestyle, her manner and through ceaseless verbal challenge, it is Kishwar Naheed."[565] Like Virginia Woolf, Kishwar Naheed benefited from her financial independence; and in her late 40s, because of her status as a widow and mother of two grown sons, she enjoyed certain liberation that many women could not. As the editor of a prestigious monthly, *Maah-i-Nau*, a government-run publication, Naheed occupied a position of certain influence in the publication scene in Pakistan. However, her publication choices landed her in trouble many times and "she was charged with various offenses on thirty different occasions."[566] She was charged with obscenity when she published an abridged version of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. She was stripped of her government office grade as a punishment but was re-instated when she challenged and won the court case.[567]

Anita Anantharam informs us that Kishwar Naheed was born into a conservative Muslim family in Uttar Pradesh, India. Her mother and grandmother observed *pardah* all their lives. While working on her master's in economics, Naheed fell in love with a classmate, Yusuf Kamran; he was a well-known Urdu poet himself.[568] She went on to marry Yusuf Kamran against her family's wishes. Her husband's was a conservative family as well and required her to observe *pardah*. Anantharam further explains that in her poem "Anticlockwise" Naheed engages with restrictions like *pardah* that were placed

[565] Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 20-21.
[566] Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 21.
[567] Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 21.
[568] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 108.

upon her by her society and "challenges the capacity of society, God, and Islam to restrict her movement."[569] Naheed writes:

> *mirē pairoṅ mēṅ zoḥbiyat*
> *aur sharam-o-hayā kī bēṛiyāṅ ḍāl kar*
> *mujhē maflūj kar kē bhī*
> *tumhēṅ yah ḳhauf nahīṅ choṛē gā*
> *keh maiṅ cal to nahīṅ saktī*
> *magar soc to saktī hūṅ*
> *azād rehnē, zindah rehnē*
> *aur mirē socnē kā ḳhauf*
> *tumhēṅ kin kin balā'oṅ mēṅ giraftār karē ga*[570]

Even after you have tied the chains of domesticity,
Shame and modesty around my feet
Even after you have paralyzed me
This fear will not leave you
That even though I cannot walk
I can still think
Your fear
Of my being free, being alive
And able to think
Might lead you, who knows, into what travails[571]

Perhaps Anantharan is reading more than there is in the poem regarding a challenge to God and Islam; however, there is definitely a challenge to society which has put those "chains" around a woman's feet, and has created all kinds of restrictions on women. Naheed is perhaps quite perceptive that what men and her society fear most is woman's potential; that she is indeed equal and capable of anything a man can think, do, and achieve, and hence men feel the need to repress women, because they feel threatened. Describing her participation in the women's movement in Pakistan to Anantharam, Kishwar Naheed stated defiantly: "I am a woman so I have to be a fighter, it is a question

[569] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 99.
[570] Poetry text from: Rukhsana Ahmad, *We Sinful Women,* 57-60.
[571] Translation from: Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember,* 98-99.

of survival. If you are not an activist, you live a life of rotten garbage with lipstick on your lips."[572]

Fahmida Riaz, like Kishwar Naheed, was also in the publishing field and served as the editor of the magazine *Awaaz*. She also came under the scrutiny of the government due to her publishing activities and there were fourteen cases of sedition filed against the magazine.[573] One of the charges could have meant a death penalty for Riaz so she went into exile to India, in 1982. She recounts her experience facing the opposition to her poetry and explains to Anita Anantharam that she "had to live like a pariah" and that she and her poetry were ridiculed as being "whorish" and "a strip tease." Riaz returned to Pakistan in 1988, the same year the Chief Martial Law Administrator and President of Pakistan, General Zia ul-Haq, died in a plane crash.[574]

In her poem "*voh ēk zan nāpāk hai*" (She is a Woman Impure), Fahmida Riaz shows how a woman is discriminated against, and marked as impure and evil based purely on the biological function of menstruating:

voh ēk zan nāpāk hai
behtē lahū kī qēd mēṅ
gardish mēṅ māh-o-sāl kī
dehkī havas kī āg mēṅ
apnī talab kī cāh mēṅ
zā'edah-e-Iblīs thī
cal dī usī kī rāh mēṅ
us manzil-e-mauhūm ko
jis kā nishāṅ pēdā nahīṅ
sangam voh nūr-o-nār kā
jis kā patā miltā nahīṅ[575]

[572] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 109.
[573] Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 23.
[574] Anantharam, *Bodies that Remember*, 107.
[575] Poetry Text from: Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 96-97.

She is a woman impure
imprisoned by her flowing blood
in a cycle of months and years.
Consumed by her fiery lust,
in search of her own desire,
this mistress of devil
followed his footsteps
into a destination obscure
unmarked, unmapped before,
that union of light and fire
impossible to find.[576]

In another poem, "*cādar aur dīvārī*" (The Veil and the Wall), Riaz takes on the practice and institution of veiling. Nekula Silva explains that the poem "*cādar aur dīvārī*" is "structured as a direct address to patriarchy" and that it shows the repressiveness of the veil as a custom that "symbolically stamps women with a particularly negative emblem."[577] The poem then takes on the issue of sexual abuse of domestic working women at the hands of men, "where the veil, which has a putative protective function, offers no protection. Even when they wear the veil, women's bodies are still violated by men…. It becomes a cosmetic symbol and a token that does not preclude male violence."[578] The poem challenges patriarchy and suggests that in fact it is not women but men that need the veil, and need to be controlled and restricted from abusing women's bodies:

yah kon haiṅ? jāntē to hoṅgē
ḥuẓūr pehcāntē to hoṅgē
yah lonḍiyāṅ haiṅ!
keh yarġhamālī ḥalāl shab bhar rahīṅ
dam ṣubaḥ dar badar haiṅ

[576] Translation from: Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 96-97.
[577] Nekula Silva, "Shameless Women: Repression and Resistance in We Sinful Women: Contemporary Feminist Urdu Poetry." *Meridians* 3, no. 2 (2003): 36.
[578] Nekula Silva, "Shameless Women." 36.

ab is tamāshē ko ḳhatam kījī'ē
ḥuẓūr ab is ko ḍhaṅp dījī'ē
siyāh cādar to ban cukī hai miri nahīṅ āp kī ẓarūrat[579]

Who are they? YOU must know them, Sire,
Your Highness must recognize them
These are the handmaidens
The hostages who are *halal* (permissible) for the night
With the breath of morning they become homeless

Bring this show to an end now,
Sire, cover it up now
Not I, but *you* need this *chadur* now[580]

Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz have had a profound influence on modern feminist Urdu poetry in the second half of the twentieth century. Ishrat Afreen follows in their footsteps and engages in overt feminist poetry, challenging patriarchy and repressive traditions that restrict women's growth and actualization. Drawing on C.M. Naim's critical judgments about these poets, and interconnecting their legacies, Asif Farrukhi writes:

> Naim gives primary credit to a triad of women poets, Kishwar Naheed, Fahmida Riaz and Perveen Shakir, who was the youngest, but who died early in a tragic accident at the height of her creative powers. Fahmida Riaz achieved her greatest success with her ground-breaking poems strongly rooted in feminine sensuousness. Her style had a classical finesse, in contrast with Naheed's growing interest in the more open form of prose-poetry. Perveen Shakir gained a large audience with her romantic, often sentimental, poetry, in comparison with which Naheed appears to be even anti-romantic. The group may be expanded to include Ada Jafarey and Zehra Nigah, who were both established poets by the time Naheed came into her own. However, Naheed's early work drew more from mainstream modernism than the work of these women poets. More than any other poet, Naheed has contributed to the slaying of what Virginia Woolf calls the 'angel in the house,' the stereotype of a quiescent woman poet acceptable to the conventional male audience. She has thus contributed to liberating the space in

[579] Poetry Text from: Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 92.
[580] Translation from: Ahmad, *We Sinful Women*, 93.

> which Perveen Shakir, Azra Abbas, Shahida Hasan, Fatima Hasan, Ishrat Afreen, Tanvir Anjum, Sara Shagufta and a number of other poets, specially women have found their personal voice.[581]

It is to Ishrat Afreen's poetry that I turn next.

IV. Selected Poetry[582]

Like Parveen Shakir, Kishwar Naheed, and Fahmid Riaz before her, Ishrat Afreen also employs both the *ghazal* and *nazm* genres to address women's issues. In the following poem she focuses on a subject that she addresses often, *anā* (pride, or ego):

ġhazal[583]

yah nāzuk sī mirē andar kī laṛkī
ajab jaẓbē ajab tēvar kī laṛkī

yūṅhī zaḳhmī nahīṅ haiṅ hāth mērē
tarāshī maiṅ nē ik patthar kī laṛkī

ḳhaṛī hai fikar kē āẓar kadē mēṅ
burīdah dast phir āẓar kī laṛkī

anā ḳho'ī tō kuṛh kar mar ga'ī
baṛī ḥassās thī andar kī laṛkī

sazāvār-e-hunar mujh kō nah ṭhehrā
yah fan mērā nah maiṅ āẓar kī laṛkī

biḳhar kar shīshah shīshah rēzā rēzā
simaṭ kar phūl sē paikar kī laṛkī

ḥavēlī kē makīṅ tō cahtē thē
keh ghar hī mēṅ rahē yah ghar kī laṛkī

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[581] Kishwar Naheed, *Defiant Colours: Selecte Poems,* ed. Asif Farrukhi (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2014), xiv.
[582] All poems are taken from Ishrat Afreen's first poetry volume *kunj pīlē phūlōṅ kā* (1985), except for the poem *Jahāṅzād,* which is in her second poetry volume *dhūp apnē hissē kī* (2005).
[583] Ishrat Afreen, *Kunj Pīlē Phūloṅ Kā*, 62.

This delicate girl within me
A girl of wondrous passion and expression

My hands are not cut needlessly
I have carved a girl in a stone

She is standing in the fire pit of anxiety, again
With clipped hands, this girl of fire

Losing her pride she became vexed and died
The girl inside was very sensitive

I was not deserving of the skill
Neither is the art mine, nor I the girl of fire

When she spreads out, it is shattered glass
Brought together, she's a flower-like girl

The people of the mansion had wanted
For this girl to stay home

As mentioned above, Afreen's use of the the term *anā* can be seen as something similar to Iqbal's notion of *ḳhudī*—a concept laced with masculinity. However, Ishrat Afreen uses this word in order to champion girls' and women's individuality, and their selfhood and personhood, which are no less important than men's ego and pride. The subject of this poem speaks for herself; she is a delicate girl, but one who is full of passion. She reminds the reader that she is a strong woman who has struggled just like anyone else; her hands are not needlessly cut, she has carved out a girl of stone. This poem may be read as commentary on the struggle of women in Pakistan during the Islamization years, however, it captures the plight of South Asian women in general. Women have had to endure oppressive traditions and restrictions in South Asia for

generations and though many women do not have much control over their lives they are able to endure this due to their strength and pride.

Pride, or ego, is another point of interest in this poem. This girl who claims to be delicate and sensitive inside has nevertheless carved herself out like a girl of stone. Her pride and ego are so important to her that if she has to compromise her *anā*, and receive a blow to her ego, she is as good as dead. Women in South Asia, or in any significantly conservative and patriarchal society, have dealt with such blows to their egos and pride regularly. The oppressive nature of their society chips away at the pride and undermines their confidence and their belief in themselves, just like the girl in this poem, who feels like she has lost her fire, her passion, and is not deserving of all that she once thought she was.

Women's value to their family and society is associated with their domesticity. They should be pleasing like flowers, which live out their lives in a vase, only for the pleasure of those in control. This girl however has another aspect too; if she spread herself and ventured out she would be like pieces of glass spread all about. In that state she would not exist for the pleasure of anyone, nor will she be ignored. Pieces of glass shine and sparkle when spread about, they are also painful if someone disregards them and steps on them. If she is not confined to the home she will be like those pieces of glass. This is precisely why those in power – the people of the mansion – wish for her to remain domesticated and not venture out where she may claim her deserving place in society.

The next *ghazal* also addresses the suffering of women but Afreen does not focus on a woman's *anā* in it in the way that she did in the last *ghazal*. In this *ghazal* there is only a moment's pride that is mentioned, not the pride and ego that is at work in defiance of society and its oppressive traditions. There is a sense of despair, most likely over a lost love and a longing for what might have been:

ġhazal[584]

adāvatēṅ naṣīb ho kē reh ga'īṅ
muḥabatēṅ raqīb ho kē reh ga'īṅ

parind haiṅ nah āṅganoṅ mēṅ pēṛ haiṅ
yah bastīyāṅ ajīb ho kē reh ga'īṅ

taras rahī hēṅ yūṅ bahār ko rutēṅ
ġharīb kā naṣīb ho kē reh gay'īṅ

bas ēk pal dhanak kī sārī shoḳhiyāṅ
mire bohat qarīb ho kē reh ga'īṅ

mirē dukhoṅ kā zikar shehar shehar hai
udāsiyāṅ naqīb ho kē reh ga'īṅ

mēṅ ḳhud sē jab bichaṛ ga'ī to bas tirī
du'āēṅ hī ḥabīb ho kē reh ga'īṅ

ravāyatoṅ kī qatalgah-e-ishq mēṅ
yah laṛkīyāṅ ṣalīb ho kē reh ga'īṅ

Hostility has become my fate
My love has become my own rival

The courtyards are devoid of birds and trees
These towns have become estranged

The seasons are longing for spring in such a way
They have become the fate of a pauper

[584] Ishrat Afreen, *Kunj Pīlē Phūloṅ Kā*, 101.

All the coquetry of the rainbow
Has drawn close to me but did not become mine

My suffering is known in each town
Sadness has become the herald

Since I became separated from myself
Just your prayers have been dear to me

In love's slaughterhouse of traditions
These girls have become crucified

There is no indication from the grammar that the person speaking is a woman. Since Afreen heard poetry through her mother and grandmother, in a woman's voice, I have taken the liberty to read a woman's voice into this *ghazal*. The somber mood created by this poem is established in the very first couplet when the subject resigns to the fact that her fate is nothing but hostility. That what was supposed to be her love, a source of joy and happiness, has in fact become a rival, a source of suffering and distress. Her world is devoid of life, lacking any sense of *joie de vivre*; the courtyards that should be filled with trees and birds – the signs of life and joy – have neither birds, nor trees in them. There is no sign of spring, without which the turn of seasons is like a fate of the pauper, never rejoicing and rejuvenating.

The only thing that the woman here can take pride in is that her suffering is well known in each town. She is not known or acknowledged for her achievements and potential but for her woes and her despair. There is some hint of this woman having had to compromise her ego. She tells her beloved that since she has been separated from herself, from her inner-self and her identity, only his prayers are her benefactors. It is not

the fate of young girls and women in her world to find love and the joy of spring in their lives; their happiness is sacrificed at the altar of those traditions.

Afreen takes the theme of the fate of girls in South Asia further in this powerful and poignant poem in which a newborn girl is made aware of her dismal fate by the first words that she hears:

mērē purkhoṇ kī pehlī du'ā – The First Prayer of My Elders[585]

rāt kī koḳh sē
ṣubaḥ kī ēk nannhī kiran nē janam yūṇ liyā
shab nē nannhī shafaq kī gulābī hasīṅ muṭhīyāṅ khol kar
kuch lakīrēṅ paṛhīṅ
aur sabā sē nah ma'lūm cupkē sē kyā keh diyā
yūṅ keh shabnam kī āṅkhoṅ sē āṅsūṅ bahē
ik sitārah haṅsā
cāṅdnī muskarātī hū'ī cal paṛī
aur niqāhat sē pehlū badaltē hū'ē
cauṅk kar mērī māṅ nē baṛē shauq sē
kuch ishārah kiyā
āhaṭoṅ aur sargoshiyoṅ mēṅ kisī nē kahā
āh laṛkī hai yah?

itnī afsurdah āvāz mērē ḳhudā
mērī pehlī samā'at peh likhī ga'ī

mērī pahlī hī sāṅsoṅ mēṅ gholā gayā
in shikastah sē lehjoṅ kā zehrīlāpan

āh laṛkī hai
laṛkī hai
laṛkī hai yah!!!
is kī qismat kī māṅgo du'ā

ab bhī mērī samā'at peh likhī hai voh
mērē purkhoṅ kī pehlī du'ā

From the womb of the night
A small ray of dawn was born like thus:

[585] Ishrat Afreen, *Kunj Pīlē Phūloṅ Kā*, 131-32.

The evening opened the rosy, beautiful fists of the twilight
Read the lines of the palm
And for a reason unknown, in a hushed voice, said to the morning breeze
In such a way that tears filled the eyes of the dew
A star laughed
Moonlight set out with a smile
And weakly turning over
Becoming alarmed, my mother, with much eagerness
Made a gesture
Among the footsteps and whispers someone said
Ah, is it a girl?

Such sorrowful voice, my god
Was engrained in my first sense of hearing

Dissolved in my first breaths
The venom of those vanquished tones

Ah, it is girl
It is a girl
It is a girl!!
Pray for her good luck

Even now it echoes in my memory
This first prayer of my elders

What is supposed to be a joyous occasion, the birth of a child, is from the very beginning filled with hopelessness and dejection. The morning breeze speaks in a hushed voice and says something that causes the dew's eyes to be filled with tears. Afreen often uses the technique of anthropomorphizing elements in nature in order to create a powerful effect. In this poem she creates a setting in which even the natural elements like the breeze and the dew are aware of the tragic occasion they are witnessing. The star laughs and the moonlight departs smiling. Their smiles and laughter are no doubt cynical and sardonic, for they are quite aware of what is in store for this newborn baby.

The newborn child's sense of hearing is filled with sounds of footsteps but amongst those sounds are the words "Ah is it a girl?" The girl, a woman now, recalls how those words full of sorrow: "Ah, it is a girl. Pray for her good luck," were uttered in such defeated tones that they were like venom being dissolved in her sense of hearing. This newborn girl is welcomed into the world by those defeated and sorrowful voices, instead of joyous ones.

Afreen captures the mentality of many people in South Asia who prefer a male child to a female because a female is viewed as a burden on family. Oomann and Ganatra explain that in highly patriarchal societies sons have more economic value and are preferred over girls. This "preference manifests itself in many ways, ranging from differential allocation of household resources, medical care and neglect of girl children to infanticide."[586] One of the earliest studies conducted on sex selective abortions at an urban clinic in India showed that 430 out of 450 women who were informed that the gender of their fetuses were female decided to have an abortion. However, all the 250 women whose fetuses were male carried their pregnancies to term, even if there was a risk of genetic disorders. One could argue that abortion is a matter of a woman's control over her reproduction regardless of what the reason may be, but Ooman and Ganatra contend that in such strongly patriarchal societies women's choices are a result of familial and societal pressure to produce male heirs. Women are often coerced into

[586] Nandini Ooman and Bela R. Ganatra, "Sex Selection: The Systematic Elimination of Girls," *Reproductive Health Matters* 10, no. 19 (2002): 184.

aborting a female fetus under threat of violence against them, and husbands even threaten remarriage.[587]

Barbara Miller quantifies this preference of males to females and reports that female-selective abortion (FSA) is practiced in many parts of Asia, including Pakistan and India. The normal Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) is 105 males to every 100 females, and the accepted norm SRB range is from 104-107 males to every 100 females. In Pakistan however, the SRB was 137 in 1986, 116 in 1987, 133 in 1988, 124 in 1989, and 117 in 1990.[588] India also practices FSA because of a preference for male children and the national SRB of India was estimated to be around 112 in 1990. A study of SRB conducted in Ludhiana, Punjab from 1983 - 1988 revealed an increase in SRB from 105 to 119.[589] There are many foreseeable harmful effects of such an imbalance of sex ratio between males and females. Lower numbers of females in a society do not raise women's status in any way; in fact, such imbalance may lead to women being seen even more like commodities and there could also be an increase in violence against women.[590] Afreen is writing in and about a society that practices such systemic discrimination against females that the discrimination starts before the girl is even born. Given this context it becomes quite understandable why Afreen would write a poem in which the birth of a girl is seen

[587] Ooman and Ganatra, "Sex Selection," 185.
[588] Barbar D. Miller, "Female-Selective Abortion in Asia: Patterns, Policies, and Debates," *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 4 (2001): 1086. Although she admits that obtaining FSA data in Pakistan is problematic because of a lack of census and survey data. Furthermore, since Islamic view on abortion is negative many people deny that FSA is practiced in Pakistan.
[589] Miller, "Female-Selective Abortion," 1085.
[590] Ooman and Ganatra, "Sex Selection," 186. The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (promulgated in 1996) made prenatal sex detection illegal in India. However, women can have an ultrasound test for many reasons and women having an abortion can give a reason other than fetal sex as a reason for abortion.

as such an inauspicious and tragic event. Afreen poses a challenge to the very history through which women were received in this world, a history that Ruby Lal discusses:

> Colonial patriarchalism—here I include the discourses of both the colonizers and the colonized—erases the figure of the girl-child by only ever acknowledging her as a woman in the future tense, that is, as wife, mother and nurturer, even as it erases women by infantilizing them and binding their claim to personhood to others—fathers, husbands, sons—most of all to the children they are obliged to produce and care for under the terms of what Adrienne Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality.' Women's social and historical dispossession happens, in part at least, through a kind of temporal displacement that always constructs the female as leaning forward into a future that more rightly belongs to someone else (husband, family, nation, etc.), or projecting backward into a child-centered past they themselves never enjoyed.[591]

The next *nazm* can also be read in multiple ways. At the first level, it is a call to action, but it can also be read as a challenge to the religious establishment, corrupt political order, patriarchy, and traditional values that are backwards and oppressive:

Rihā'ī - Liberation[592]

asīr logo
uṭho
aur uṭh kar pahāṛ kāṭo
pahāṛ murdāh ravāyatoṅ kē
pahāṛ andhī 'aqīdatoṅ kē
pahāṛ ẕālim 'adāwatoṅ kē

hamārē jismoṅ kē qēdḳhānoṅ mēṅ
sēṅkaṛoṅ bēqarār jism
aur_____udās rūḥēṅ sisak rahī haiṅ
vōh zīnā zīnā bhaṭak rahī haiṅ
ham un kō āzād kab karēṅgē
hamārā honā hamārī ānē vālī nasloṅ kē vāstē hai

[591] Ruby Lal, *Coming of Age in Nineteenth-Century India: The Girl-Child and the Art of Playfulness* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press), 45.
[592] Ishrat Afreen, *Kunj Pīlē Phūloṅ Kā*, 181-82.

ham unkē maqrūẓ haiṅ
jo ham sē vujūd lēṅgē
numūd lēṅgē

kaṭē hū'ē ēk sar sē lākhoṅ saroṅ kī takhlīq
ab kahānī nahīṅ rahī hai
lahū mēṅ jo shē dhaṛak rahī hai
gumak rahī hai
hazāroṅ āṅkhēṅ
badan kē ḳhalīyoṅ sē jhāṅktī bēqarār āṅkhēṅ
yah keh rahī haiṅ
asīr logo
jo zard patthar kē ghar mēṅ yūṅ bēḥisī kī cādar lappēṭ kar so rahē haiṅ
un ko kaho
keh uṭh kar pahāṛ kāṭēṅ
hamēṅ rihā'ī sūcnā hai

Oh imprisoned people
Rise!
And having risen, cut through mountains
The mountains of blind devotions
Of malicious oppression

In the prisons of our bodies
Hundreds of restless hearts
And…melancholic souls are sobbing
They are wandering from (lit: stair to stair) door to door??
When will we liberate them?

Our existence is for our future generations
We are indebted to them
Those who will take their existence from us
And their identity from us

The sprouting of a thousand heads from one severed head
Is not a tale any longer
The thing that is palpitating in the blood
Is echoing
Thousands of eyes
Restless eyes peeking from the cells of the body
Are saying this
Imprisoned people
The ones asleep in a yellow-brick house;
Wrapped in a sheet of unconsciousness

Tell them
That they should rise and tear down mountains
We are in search of liberation

Afreen is a feminist poet who was influenced by the Progressive Writers' Movement and here, in the shadow of Kaifi Azmi, she is telling not just women, but everyone to rise. Whereas Azmi was addressing women to break the chains of old traditions and to rise and walk alongside him, Afreen is addressing everyone alike. She views her entire society captive in a prison of blind devotions. As discussed in chapter five, Karachi, home to both Parveen Shakir and Ishrat Afreen, has been a hotbed of divisiveness and sectarian violence. The violence is as much a product of devotion to sectarian leaders as it is associated with poor socio-economic conditions. The poet sees her society in the throws of apathy and in a malaise when it comes to thinking for themselves. She would like for people to rise up and challenge the status quo, to cut through those mountains that are hindering progress. This is quite a bold poem considering that it can easily be taken as a challenge to the political order; and such challenges often meant imprisonment under General Zia's martial law in Pakistan.

One may also read this poem as a feminist's challenge to her society that they must wake up and see the damage they are causing to their daughters by following age-old patriarchal traditions. The poet reminds them that this liberation from patriarchy is not only for their own benefit, bur rather for the future generations that are counting on their ancestors to create and leave a just and equitable society. She admonishes them that it is not a matter of mere tales anymore, that one severed head gives rise to thousands in its place. Each time a woman was unjustly imprisoned under the discriminatory laws of

Pakistan, thousands of women were inspired to challenge the government. It is already happening, she reminds them; and more must join in the struggle for the sake of their progeny, for the sake of justice, and for the liberation of their own souls.

In the introduction to Ishrat Afreen's second poetry volume, *Dhūp Apnē Ḥissē Kī*, the poet Fahmida Riaz writes, that *Jahāṅzād* is an extremely important poem, in which Afreen completes the picture by giving voice to Jahanzad and presenting her side of the story.[593] *Jahāṅzād* is a poem in response to Noon Meem Rashid's *Hasan kūzāgar*, written from Hasan's perspective, in which Hasan is addressing the woman Jahanzad while lamenting his own misfortune, and not considering how Jahanzad has struggled in life. This poem is several pages long hence I have only included excerpts here and have presented the excerpts with their translations individually, instead of in one long version:

Jahāṅzād[594]

ai ḥasan kūzahgar
tū nē jānā keh mēṅ
jism-o-jāṅ kē ta'luq kī raushan guzargāh sē
ik jahāṅ kā safar jhīl kar
is rifāqat kī dehlīz tak ā'ī hūṅ
ai ḥasan kāsh tū jān saktā
keh is ṣehanḳhāneh sē dehlīz tak kē safar mēṅ
jahāṅzād ko kyūṅ zamānē lagē haiṅ
ḥasan
is safar mēṅ jahāṅzād ko ēk ik gām par
waqt kē tāzyānē lagē haiṅ

Oh, potter Hasan!
Did you know that I
From the lit up passage of life and body
Having suffered a world's journey

[593] Fahminda Riaz, "*Dard Kī Nanhī Sī Lau*," In *Dhūp Apnē Hiṣṣē Kī*, (Karachi: Sam'i Sons Printers, 2005), 12.
[594] Ishrat Afreen, *Dhūp Apnē Hiṣṣē Kī*, Karachi: Sam'i Sons Printers, 2005, 127-136.

Have come to the threshold of this friendship
Oh Hasan, if only you knew
That in the journey from this courtyard to the porch
The reason Jahanzad took an age
Hasan
On this journey at every step Jahanzad
Has endured the scourge of time

magar dēkh mujh ko
keh mēṅ nē yahāṅ ṭhīk nau sāl tak
phūl kaṛhē haiṅ bistar peh…lēkin
abhī tak kō'ī un peh sōyā nahīṅ
phūl tāzah, shaguftah aur āzardah haiṅ
maiṅ nē nau sāl ṣūratgarī kī hai tērē har ik lams kī
rāt bhar maiṅ nē āṅkhēṅ bhigō'ī haiṅ kūzoṅ mēṅ aur ṣubaḥ dam
ḥalq ko tar kiyā āṅsūoṅ sē bohat

But look at me
That here, for exactly nine years
I have embroidered flowers on the bed…but
No one has slept on them till now
The flowers are fresh, blooming, and troubled
I have painted/sculpted each touch of yours for nine years
All through the night I have shed tears in pots, and come morn
I have quenched my thirst with tears

magar yah tū nē kyā kahā
"keh tērē jēsī 'auratēṅ jahāṅzād
aisī uljhanēṅ haiṅ jin kō āj tak kō'ī nahīṅ sulajh sakā
keh' auratoṅ kī sāḳht hai voh tanz apnē āp par
javāb jin kā ham nahīṅ"

But what did you say:
"that women like you Jahanzad
are such complications which no one has ever been able to solve;
that the nature of women is such a joke upon themselves
for which we have no answer."

tujhē yah gumāṅ thā
keh 'aurat muhabbat kī bāzī mēṅ bējān pattē kī sūrat
kisī dast cabak ki marhūn minnat
voh is khēl mēṅ ēk muhrē kī ṣūrat
keh jab jis nē cāhā
usē ēk ghar sē uṭhā kar

kisī dūsrē ghar kā mālik banāyā
keh aurat faqat ēk patthar kī mūrat
yah taṣvīr ḥairat!
yūṅhī cup ḳhaṛī hai?
yūṅhī cup rahē gī?
magar yūṅ nahīṅ hai

You had thought
That in the game of love a woman is like a lifeless card/leaf
Is under the power (obligation) of a skilled hand
That she is a mere pawn in this game
That whenever someone wishes
He can move her form one place
That a woman is only a stone statue
Such perplexing picture!
Is standing speechless?
Will remain silent?
But this is not so

ai ḥasan mērē ēk ik darīcē peh
kuhnah rivāyat-o-zālim ʻaqāid kā jangal ugā thā
ḥasan
kāsh tū mērī āṅkhoṅ sē mērē darīcē kō taktā
to yah jān saktā
jahāṅ tū khaṛā thā vahāṅ ēk ik darāz sē
mērī āṅkhēṅ, mērā jism
chan chan ké
kat kat kē girtā rahā thā

Oh Hasan! Outside all my windows
Grew a jungle of decrepit traditions and brutal beliefs
Hasan
If only you saw with my eyes, my own window
You would know
From every fissure of your station
My eyes, my body
Fell through the sieve
In butchered pieces.

In this poem the poet is not only giving voice to Jahanzad, but is also voicing the grievances of countless women through the centuries. Jahanzad speaks for all women when she reminds Hasan that her journey from the courtyard to the porch has taken an

age - a symbolic journey that represents the slow progress of women's rights. She asks him if during all his lamenting about himself he has thought about how she has faced obstacles at each step, and has endured the scourge of time.

As is often the case for women in patriarchal societies, Jahanzad is denied the fruition of her hopes and dreams. Her life seems to be that of someone who has embroidered flowers and decorated her bed yet has not been able to sleep on it. She may be referring to the prohibition to meet her beloved because of societal restrictions. As discussed in chapter three, and in this chapter, women in South Asia, especially in Pakistan, often do not have much say in whom they marry. Or her dreams may have nothing to do with a beloved at all. She may be referring to her desire for education, or her hopes of professional achievement, all of which are denied to her or made difficult to attain.

Invoking Iqbal's stance on women's "problem," Jahanzad asks how Hasan could say something similar: That women are such complications that their situation cannot be "solved." That their creation is a cruel joke? Did he think that she was like a lifeless pawn that could be manipulated without her will? Did he think that she would remain quiet and allow herself to be exploited? She will not remain silent. And neither did the women of the Women's Action Forum and other women's organizations in Pakistan, when faced with discriminatory laws and blatant marginalization of their status as equal citizens. Like Jahanzad, women in Pakistan have resolved to not let discrimination go unchallenged. Although the women of Pakistan have many struggles ahead of them, they have organized and poised a united front against patriarchy and oppression.

Conclusion

Ishrat Afreen says that Iqbal has had a profound impact on modern Urdu poetry. She says that Iqbal is the one who "laid the foundation of objective poetry," and it was he who introduced the idea of theoretical and philosophical poetry.[595] However, for all his philosophical musings, Iqbal was a man of his time. He had failed to see in the early twentieth century, that women of South Asia could thrive independently and champion their own cause. Whereas Iqbal believed that women needed men to protect them, later poets disagreed. Women poets saw that even though many progressive men wanted to help them they could not simply count on men alone to create a just world for them, and that they had to take action on their own behalf.

As this chapter has shown, not only did men *not* protect women in Pakistan, they actually made matters worse for them by introducing discriminatory laws. Through its Islamic laws, the Pakistani government created conditions that made exploitation of women easier. Laws like the *Hudood* Ordinances only provided legal sanction for existing patriarchal norms. Women knew then that they could not wait for men to come to their rescue. Women's organizations took a leading role in challenging discrimination and poets like Ishrat Afreen gave voice to the struggles of women.

[595] Ishrat Afreen, questionnaire answers, February 14, 2015.

Chapter Seven - Conclusion

I. Recent Reforms and Women's Rights in Pakistan

Pakistan was put at the front lines in the post-9/11 Global War on Terrorism. With western media presence in the region, Pakistan and its leaders came under the scrutiny of various international organizations and regimes. This close monitoring of events in Pakistan led to widespread international outcry when the world found out about the rape and subsequent events in Mukhtar Mai's case. Perhaps because of the international pressure generated after widespread publicity of Mukhtar Mai's case, the government of President Pervez Musharaf (b. 1943) finally amended two of the *Hudood* ordinances by passing the Protection of Women Act, 2006 (PWA). These ordinances dealt with *zina* (adultery), and *qazf* (slandering or baseless accusation against a woman for having committed an immoral act). The PWA removed the earlier provision that required a rape victim to produce four pious Muslim men as witnesses in order to prove that rape had been committed. In the past the provision made it almost impossible for a man to be convicted of rape. The PWA further stipulated that a complaint of rape may not be converted to charges of *zina* (adultery), which had deterred many women from reporting being raped, for fear of being charged with adultery if they were unable prove their case. The Act also stated that failure to prove the charge of *zina* would entail the punishment for *qazf* (baseless accusation). Although an improvement, the passage of the Act drew

criticism as women's groups denounced Musharraf for not getting rid of the *Hudood* Ordinances entirely.[596]

The National Commission on the Status of Women conducted a study to assess the impact of the PWA and gathered data from the Islamabad Capital Territory police station in 2010. The study concluded that the impact of the PWA of 2006 was indeed positive and that in the Islamabad region *zina* (adultery) cases registered by the police went from a high of seventeen in 2003 to a low of five in 2010. After the passage of the *Hudood* Ordinaces women could easily spend years in jail while waiting for their trial. According to this study, the number of female prisoners awaiting trials reduced significantly since the passage of the PWA. The study stated that this number could be reduced even further with effective implementation of the provision in the PWA that requires women to be released from jail on bail if they had spent six months or more awaiting trial. However, the authorities mostly ignore this provision.[597]

Other findings of the study showed an increase in women reporting rape cases (since rape has been removed from *Hudood* Ordinance), and the reduction of custodial abuse of women. Prior to the PWA, women used to be regularly abused both physically and sexually by the police. However, under the PWA 2006, the police cannot hold a woman in jail for more than twenty-four hours without bringing her to a magistrate.[598]

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[596] National Commission on the Status of Women, Islamabad. *Study to Assess Implementation Status of Women Protection Act 2006* (pp. 3-4). Accessed February 11, 2015. http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/prod_images/pub/StudyonWomenProtectionAct2006.pdf

[597] National Commission on the Status of Women, Islamabad. *Study to Assess Implementation Status of Women Protection Act 2006* (pp. 8-9). Accessed February 11, 2015. http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/prod_images/pub/StudyonWomenProtectionAct2006.pdf

[598] National Commission on the Status of Women, Islamabad. *Study to Assess Implementation Status of Women Protection Act 2006* (pp. 10-11). Accessed February 11, 2015.

Though this study suggests that the PWA of 2006 has had a positive impact, it may be difficult to ascertain the full effect since the study was limited to one geographical region – the Islamabad Capital Territory - and did not take into account that the majority of charges against women have taken place in poor and rural areas of Pakistan.

II. Future of Women's Movements in Pakistan

Ayesha Jalal, the prominent historian of South Asia, has asserted that if women's organizations like the Women's Action Forum (or WAF, whose membership consists of middle and upper-class women) are to succeed in championing women's rights they cannot look at the issues only from a gendered perspective. They would also need to make a conscious effort to address class issues, such as the socio-economic interests of the women from the lower classes of Pakistani society. Jalal concludes that the reason why Benazir Bhutto's government did not make gender issues a priority, and failed to address them effectively, was because the masses of marginalized segments of society were not on board with the agenda of organizations like WAF. In order to counter the discriminatory policies set during Zia's regime, gender and class issues would need to be linked. In short, she is raising the issue of "intersectionality." Jalal explains that middle and upper class women enjoy many privileges in return for a level of subservience on their part, and that "until such time that the urban middle- and upper-class women grasp the contradiction between an attachment to social privileges flowing from the class

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http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/prod_images/pub/StudyonWomenProtectionAct2006.pdf

accommodations of their families and the social subservience which is their fate *qua* women, the gender balance in Pakistani society is unlikely to be restored."[599]

Since Jalal's assessment that WAF needed broader support from the lower classes, more sections of society have thrown in their support for feminist causes in Pakistan. However, Pakistani feminist activist Afiya Shehrbano Zia asserts that the highly inclusive policies of secular feminist organizations such as the WAF have given way to mainstream acceptance of Islamic feminism, putting secular feminism at risk. Islamic feminism has started redefining the feminist agenda within the Islamic framework. Afiya Zia contends that this poses a danger because people interpret theology differently and the acceptance of Islamic feminism would lead to judgments of who is a good or bad Muslim woman.[600]

The strategy to challenge anti-woman legislation from within the framework of Islam, by using progressive interpretations of Islam, was started in Pakistan by WAF in the 1980s. Doing so brought them some support of right-wing fundamentalist political parties, at least on issues like rape. These right-wing parties however did not agree with WAF's agenda of completely overturning the *Hudood* Ordinances. Like Ayesha Jalal, the Islamists in Pakistan also criticized the WAF and others with a secular stance for not doing enough to mobilize women from across all classes of Pakistani society.[601] Zia argues that "Islamic feminists" like Riffat Hasan and Farida Shaheed "are involved in

[599] Ayesha Jalal, in *Women, Islam & the State*. Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.). (1991, pp. 107-08).
[600] Afiya Shehrbano Zia (2009, p. 29).
[601] Afiya Shehrbano Zia (2009, p. 32).

reinterpreting and reexamining a masculinist reading of the Quran and Shariah,"[602] which is problematic because Islamic feminism seems to be gaining mainstream acceptance at the expense of secular feminism.[603] Zia acknowledge that secular political feminism will be viewed as the voice of the West and western NGOs by many segments of Pakistani soceity but concludes that there is also danger in fighting patriarchy from within a patriarchal discourse.[604]

However, recent activists in Muslim countries have argued that in order to fight for women's rights, the Quran is a sufficient sourcebook. One need not draw from other authoritative Islamic sources, like the *Hadith*, *Sunnah,* and the *Sharia.* Many of these sources outside the Quran are commentaries on the Prophet Muhammad's life and are laws that were created by the understanding of men who lived during the first centuries of Islam. Their interpretations were a product of their social context and of a society that was organized in a highly hierarchical and patriarchal manner.[605] Reformist Islamic theorists have argued that the Quran should be the only source of guidance because it alone is the word of God. They have further argued that Quranic instruction can be broken down into:

> …the socio-economic and the ethical-religious categories. While women's status is inferior to men's in the former category, they are full equals in the latter…that the difference between men and women in the socio-economic sphere belongs to the category of social relations (*mu'amalat*), which are subject to change, whereas their moral and religious equality belongs to the category of religious duties

[602] Afiya Shehrbano Zia (2009, p. 31). Farida Shaheed became the Executive Director of Shirkat Gah, whose members started Women's Action Forum (*khawātīn Mahāz-e-Amal*), in 2013. Since 1986 Shirkat Gah has been the Asia Coordination office of the international solidarity network called Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML).
[603] Afiya Shehrbano Zia (2009, p. 30).
[604] Afiya Shehrbano Zia (2009, p. 44-45).
[605] Iman Hashim (1999, p. 11).

> towards God (*ibadat*), which are immutable. The moral and religious equality of men and women represents the highest expression of the value of equality and therefore constitutes the most important aspect of Islamic instruction. Since men and women are full equals in creation, in mind, and in their spiritual obligation (i.e., the category of *ibadat*), there is no justification for inequalities between the sexes.[606]

Even though many activists and Islamic feminists see Islam and the Quran as a means to combat discrimination against women, Afiya Zia argues for Pakistani feminism to take on a secular stance, or at least not get overshadowed by Islamic feminism. However, the socio-political need of the time in Pakistan at present, as it was in the 1980s, may be to summon Islamic texts and traditions to champion the rights of women. Until the politics of Pakistan change and become secular as a whole, it would seem appropriate and more prudent for women to use whatever strategy makes the lives of the largest number of women better. I must also point out that secularism, like feminism, is a contested term in South Asia. Its usefulness is hotly debated. Its implementation is tinged with skepticism for many. As Mahmood Monshipouri points out, "Secularization-from-above in Pakistan (as in the case of Turkey) has failed to generate a sense of cultural identity. Islamism, on the other hand, has given Pakistan's marginal elements of political expression and cultural identity."[607]

Although poets are not necessarily in the forefront of ideology creation and policy decisions, they have historically given a voice to the oppressed and the marginalized. Urdu poetry holds a prominent status in large parts of South Asia and its appeal is ubiquitous. Whether it was to create a united Muslim identity in India, to advocate for

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[606] Iman Hashim (1999, p. 9).

[607] Mahmood Monshipouri, "Comments on F.S. Aijazuddin's 'The Shifting *Qiblah,'* in *The Future of Secularism,* ed. T.N. Srinivasan (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 157.

equal participation of women in the nationalist struggle, to hail the socialist ideal, or to demand gender equality, the five poets discussed in this study have not only tried to address the needs of their times, they have also successively moved the conversation over women's issues and rights forward. At the dawn of the twentieth century, Urdu poetry was a space primarily reserved for men, where women could only participate using their initials.[608] However, because the poets I have discussed brought the issue of women's rights into Urdu poetry, and created a space to demand women's equality, women were able to enter that space by their own right and lend authentic women's voices to their struggles and movements.

III. Woman's Journey in Modern Urdu Literature

maiṅ aurat hūṅ! - I Am A Woman![609]

kuch ēk ṣadī kā qiṣṣā hai ik shā'ir thā ḥikmat vālā
voh, jis nē behas uṭhā'ī thī
āzādī-e-nisvāṅ behtar hai yā ṭauq zamurrad kā bolo
qīmat mēṅ kaun ziyādah hai
tab maiṅ nē cunā āzādī ko, mujhē nām milā pehcān milī
'Azmat ke surīlē bol maiṅ thī Hāli kī cup kī dād maiṅ thī
main Shīrānī kē khāboṅ kī Salmā thī aur Reḥānah thī
kab jītī jāgtī 'aurat thī bas ēk ḥasīṅ afsānah thī
tab mērē qalam kī cingārī angārē mēṅ tabdīl huī
ek khāhish khud ko pānē kī us khāhish kī takmīl huī
yūn apnī khoj mēṅ khud nikliī main 'Ismat aur Adā ban kar
shā'ir nē kahā āzād haiṅ lab maiṅ us lab kī tā'īd banī
aur ek na'ī duniyā kē li'ē maiṅ ēk na'ī ummīd banī
maiṅ Zahrah aur Parvīn hu'ī Fahmīdah aur Nahīd banī
'Ainī Motī Prītam Ṣafyah azādī kī tamhīd banī
sāthī nē kahā uṭh jān mērī ab sāth mērē calnā hai tujhē
kya achcha ho māthē peh girē is āncal ko parcam kar lē

[608] For instance the poet Zahida Khatoon Sherwani, who used her initials *zē ḳhē shīn*
[609] Ishrat Afreen, unpublished poem, 2015.

tab maiṅ nē ḳhud sē pyar kiyā aur jinē ka iqrār kiyā
phir hāth mēṅ le kar hāth calī ik āg kā daryā pār kiyā
mirī ān baṛhī mirā mān baṛhā mirī godī cānd gulāb na'ē
mirē āṅgan āṅgan tārā hai mirī ānkhoṅ ānkhoṅ khāb na'ē
gul makai aur Malālah hūṅ imroz hūṅ aur ā'indah hūṅ
maiṅ tīsrī duniyā kī aurat zindah hūṅ aur tābindah hūṅ

A century or so ago, a wise poet lived
He, who opened the debate
Is women's freedom better, or, an emerald necklace? Tell me!
Which has more worth?
It is then I picked freedom
I found my name, I found my identity
I was in Azmat's melodious sayings, I was in Hali's Praise for Silence
I was the Salma and Rehana of Shirani's dreams
When was I ever a living woman, I was just a lovely tale
It's then that the spark of my pen turned into embers
I had the desire to find my self; that desire was fulfilled
I embarked on my search, turning into Ismat and Ada
The poet said "lips are free," I became the consent of those lips
And for a new world, I became a new hope
I became Zahra and Parveen, Fahmida and Nahid
Aini, Moti, Pritam, Safiya, I became the prelude to freedom
My comrade said, Rise my darling, you must walk with me:
What a wonder it would be
Seeing your veil changed to banner
Then I began to love myself, and consented to life
I walked hand in hand, I crossed the river of fire
My pride grew, my honor grew, in my embrace new moons and roses
In my every courtyard a star twinkles, in my each eye, ever-new dreams
I am Gul Makai and Malala, I am today and tomorrow
I am a woman of the Third World, I am alive, I shine

And thus speaks a third-world woman, proud of her gender, spirited by her origins. She begins her story a century ago, with Iqbal. She calls him wise. She sees him as a pioneer. She engages him on an issue that might seem asinine to today's readers: freedom or an emerald necklace? Have your pick. She responds to him earnestly. She picks freedom. She gains self worth. She expresses gratitude to those who helped her proceed through space and time: Hyderabad's Azmatullah Khan (1887-1927) who

composed *Surīlē Bol* (Melodious Words), poetry that touched lives of women around him; Panipat's Altaf Husain Hali (1837-1914), Iqbal's inspiration who advocated education for "mothers, sisters, and daughters" in 1905; Akhtar Shirani, who gave his beloved a woman's name. In the company of these men, the woman turns the spark of her pen into embers—a reference to the controversial collection of stories that boldly engaged sexuality and gender in 1932. This woman takes on many names simultaneously—names of her peers in writing, and names with compelling significance: Ismat [Honor] Chughtai (1915-1991), Ada [Style] Jafri (1924-2015), Zahra [Radiant] Nigah, Parveen [Pleiades] Shakir (1952-1994), Fahmida [Knowledgable] Riaz, Kishwar Nahid [Venus], Aini [Vision] Hyder (1927-2007), Moti [Pearl] Shaukat Kaifi, Amrita Pritam [Lover] (1919-2005), and Safiya [Pure] Akhtar (d. 1953). This woman alludes to the remarkable words of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1981), "speak, for your lips are free." She answers Kaifi's call and rises with him. She embraces Majaz Lakhnavi (1911-1955), the "Keats of Urdu," who prefers his beloved woman to hold a banner instead of covering her head. She crosses the obstacles of writing and publishing by sailing on Urdu's magnum opus novel, Qurratulain "Aini" Hyder's *Āg Kā Daryā* (River of Fire). This woman then reaches the rank of Gul Makai (Corn Flower), the woman better known as Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist, and the youngest Nobel laureate. She lays claims to the "Third World," without telling us how she would appear differently in the First or the Second World. For instance, would she be able to connect to the First World without winning their Nobel Prize?

Some might fault this woman for suppressing other identities as well: What about that of the prostitutes who inhabit the poetry of Sahir Ludhyanvi and the poetic prose of Sadat Hasan Manto? Could we not consider these women the highest self, the *ḳhudī*, of modern South Asia? How could we even write about women in Urdu without seriously engaging Manto's Mummy and Sultana, both prostitutes? What about women who wrote under men's names? Should we treat them as inferior women for speaking from a superior position of disguise? What about men and women who embraced an ambiguous gender identity, Chicago's Ifti Nasim or Hyderabad's "Begum"? How do we locate their struggles against homophobia in communities of men and women? Sufficient it is to keep these omissions in mind for the sake of modesty and honesty.

Summation

This dissertation has traced a few ways in which the female figure has emerged and evolved as the subject of romance and resistance in twentieth-century Urdu poetry. It has explored the ways in which Urdu poetry engages with and addresses contemporary women's issues. In order to do so, I have concentrated on five poets, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Akhtar Shirani (1905-1948), Kaifi Azmi (1919-2002), Parveen Shakir (1952-1994), and Ishrat Afreen (b. 1956).

In Chapter One I presented the development of feminism and women's rights movements from the third world perspective as well as from within the framework of Islam. In order to understand the nature of power structures and the forms of resistance

these poets represented, it is important to understand the colonial third world, nationalist, and Islamicate contexts in which these poets composed their poetry.

Chapter Two looked at the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal and the historical context of nationalist struggle in which Muslim leaders were trying to forge a united Indian-Muslim identity through their engagement in the *Khilafat* Movement. Iqbal was an advocate of religious revivalism and believed that Indian Muslims could improve their position in a largely Hindu India by being true to the fundamentals of Islam. He resisted reformist trends during the nationalist struggle, which advocated for more women's rights, such as women's education, property rights, and easing of *pardah*.

The poetry of Akhtar Shirani in Chapter Three engaged with the subject of romantic love with women. He broke with the general convention of using gender neutral or male verbal inflections to talk of the relationships between the *'āshiq* (lover) and the *ma'shūq* (beloved), and used the feminine verbal inflection instead. Breaking with convention, he used his poetry to champion women's education and composed poetry challenging traditions such as arranged marriage and patriarchal practices of control over women, such as veiling.

Kaifi Azmi, a communist and a member of the Progressive Writers' Movement was the subject of Chapter Four. Azmi dedicated his work and life trying to create a socialist India. As a progressive writer he believed that art should be used to make society better and to ease the suffering of people. To this end he championed women's equality and resisted outdated traditions that oppressed women and which relegated them to an inferior status. Not only did Azmi resist and challenge patriarchal institutions he also

resisted capitalism and consumerism, which he also viewed as oppressive to society and women's labor.

The first female poet of this study, Parveen Shakir, was introduced in Chapter Five. Shakir is generally considered the poet of love and romance and has been largely excluded from the canon of feminist Urdu poetry. However, as I have shown, her poetry can and should be read for its subversive nature, as she composed poetry on taboo subjects, such as women's romantic and sexual desires. These topics were especially risqué in her time because of the fundamentalist Islamic trajectory Pakistan was on politically and socially. She engaged with issues such as the objectification of women and the poor working conditions for women, as well as child labor. She questioned the authority of the government and challenged hyper-masculinity when she composed poetry on sectarian violence in Karachi.

Chapter Six looked at the poetry of Ishrat Afreen. This chapter presented Pakistani women's struggle against the politics of Islamization in some detail in order to explain the social context of Afreen's poetry. Her poetry responds to Iqbal's notion of *ḳhudī*, which he used to bolster the resolve of Muslim men. She uses the concept of *anā*, which she employs in reminding women that their status is not inferior to men and that they do not need men to protect them. Afreen is hailed as a feminist poet who uses her poetry to challenge traditional thinking that views women as inferior to men. The poets discussed in this study have played a role in the construction of gender ideas in their societies, and because of their contributions the twenty-first century looks much better for women.

The strength of this project lies in its sense of being incomplete. I wish I could end this work by saying "and they lived happily ever after;" or, even, "and they never faced this issue again." Those issues that were relevant in Iqbal's time continue to be pressing in the time of Ishrat Afreen—a woman raised in the country that considers Iqbal its spiritual father.

My work has simply been a testimony to the resilience of those committed to fighting for justice, in this case gender-based justice. Iqbal did not have all the answers but the few that he did inspired the women who came after him to critique him but not to dismiss him outright. What brings these poets together is their faith in a "collective." All of us know that not all women suffer equally and not all women suffer due to the gender that is identified with them—class, religion, caste, region render the gender divide untidy. For example, in the Gujarat of 2002, the Punjab of 1947, the Bengal of 1971, the Kashmir of 1991, the Delhi of 1984, women were singled out for violence because they belonged to a particular religious community. No matter how much Kaifi wishes to do so, a Muslim woman simply cannot be absorbed into a Hindu one in Pakistan nor a Hindu woman into a Muslim one in India.[610]

In this study, I did not have an opportunity to seriously study the global networks that strengthen and weaken women's struggles in South Asia—struggles that are inspired by the likes of Parveen Shakir and Ishrat Afreen. For example, women's well-being could not be enhanced when they become an excuse for colonial and imperial perpetrations. In the case of Ishrat Afreen, I feel it is important to ask questions related to her aesthetics in

[610] Conversations with Syed Akbar Hyder, March, 2015.

the last thirty years—after she moved to the United States from Pakistan. In confidence, she also discussed issues with me which I cannot convey in writing. As I continue to think through these matters, I hope to look at the next generation of Urdu poets, both male and female, especially those who have grown up in the Pakistani society that has become accustomed to a more conservative brand of Islam. Furthermore, all the poets in this study have been from Northern India and Pakistan. South India has had a strong tradition of Urdu poetry as well, such as the poetry of Bano Tahira Saeed. In the context of Kaifi, I mentioned the Urdu-Hindi cinema. A worthwhile project would be a study of the feminist poetry of Sahir Ludhyanvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, and Shahryar as it engages prose of women's empowerment—that of Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Qurratulain Hyder, Ismat Chughtai, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Mirza Hadi Rusva. This would also mean transcending genres, locations, and disciplines, a necessary endeavor if one wishes to be just to the topic. In the words of Parveen Shakir, I close:

'aks-e ḳhushbū hūṅ bikharnē sē nah rokē ko'ī
aur bikhar jā'uṅ to mujh ko nah samēṭē ko'ī[611]

I am a reflection of the fragrance,
Let no one stop me from spreading,
And when I do spread,
Let no one bring me back together.

[611] Parveen Shakir, *Khushbū*, In *Mah-e-Tamām: Kulliyāt*, 47.

Transliteration Scheme

alif: a, i, u, ā

b p t ṭ ṡ j c ḥ ḳh

d ḍ ż r ṛ z zh

s sh ṣ ẓ ṯ ẕ ‘ ġh

f q k g l m n

vā’o: v, ū, o, au

h

choṭī yē: ī

baṛī yē: y, ē, ai

nūn ġhunnah: ṅ

hamzah: ’

iẓafat: -e-

Aspirations: bh ph th ṭh jh ch dh ḍh ṛh kh

Short Vowels: a, e, i, o, u.

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